

Niflheim Academy

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Fandom: harry potter

Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Fic type: Books/Harry Potter

Pairings/Main char.: Harry P.

Published: 2016-04-10

Last updated: 2018-08-23

Words count: 71,674

Chapters count: 14

Converted using www.FF2EBOOK.com

Date: 2020-07-30

1. Chapter 1

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

I do not own Harry Potter, Abhorsen, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, or Monster Hunter. I'm just playing with them.

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CHAPTER ONE

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"And what exactly did you want with me, Lucius?" Dumbledore asked politely, a clear blue fire blazing in his eyes as he stared down the Pureblood who had so rudely invaded Hagrid's home in the dead of night.

"*Dreadful* thing, Dumbledore," Mister Malfoy declared lazily as if he didn't notice the disapproval, rummaging under his cloak for a long roll of official looking parchment which he waved somewhat mockingly in the headmaster's general direction before unrolling. "But the governors feel it's

time for you to step aside. This is an Order of Suspension – you'll find all twelve signatures on it," he explained handing it over with a flourish as the headmaster stoically accepted the parchment and scanned it carefully. "I'm afraid we feel you're losing your touch. How many attacks have there been now?" he asked slyly, "Two more this afternoon, wasn't it? At this rate, there'll be no Muggleborns left at Hogwarts, and we all know what an *awful* loss that would be to the school," he lamented sarcastically, the faintest shadow of a triumphant smirk curling the edge of his lips as he inclined his head.

Minister Fudge paled, "Oh, now, see here, Lucius," he blustered, looking alarmed, "Dumbledore suspended... no, no... last thing we want just now..."

Mister Malfoy rolled his eyes, "The appointment – or suspension – of the Headmaster is a matter for the governors, Fudge," the former Slytherin pointed out smoothly, gesturing elegantly with one hand as he tilted his head, "And as Dumbledore has failed to stop these attacks..." he trailed off meaningfully with a significant look before glancing to the stony faced headmaster.

"But I have a solution!" Fudge exclaimed, fiddling with his bowler hat and frowning a little, "One... I dare say will now actually work better with the governors' decision, upon second thought"

Harry and Ron exchanged nervous glances under the cover of the invisibility cloak, they didn't like the sound of that.

"Oh? Do tell, Minister, do well," Mister Malfoy drawled condescendingly, looking bored.

Fudge glanced quickly at Dumbledore before nervously mopping at his sweaty forehead with a chequered handkerchief, "Well, you see, it's all rather *obvious*, isn't it? This Heir of Slytherin malarkey. Salazar Slytherin was most well known for being a Parselmouth, amongst other things, a talent we know is hereditary; You-Know-Who is a known descendent who also speaks to snakes; the crest of Slytherin house is a serpent – it stands to reason that Slytherin's monster would obviously be a snake of some

description," the portly politician explained. Harry felt Ron palm his face behind him, murmuring about why hadn't they thought of that. Harry meanwhile, began to feel a little bit sick as he began to get an idea of where Fudge was going with all this.

"And I'm assuming you have a point to this, Fudge?" Mister Malfoy sneered impatiently, making the Minister flinch.

"Of course, of course! Err, y-yes, well, people talk, you know? And given recent events, and discoveries, bearing in mind that the monster is likely to be a snake, some people at the Ministry – not me – are beginning to wonder if You-Know-Who didn't go after the Potters because he didn't want *competition*, and while I don't think for one minute that Mister Potter is *responsible* for the attacks, the fact remains that he's the only one capable of controlling the monster that we know of, and – " he rambled sweating nervously in his pinstripes as Dumbledore's eyes went colder than ever, and Hagrid began to swell and turn red with rage, while Mister Malfoy's dark eyes glittered with something like glee. Harry felt like someone had shoved a hand into his chest and squeezed his lungs shut, he couldn't *breathe*.

Hagrid exploded, making everyone jump, including their hidden audience.

"JEST WHAT ARE YEH TRYIN' TO INSINUATE?!" he roared, starting forward only to stop as Dumbledore's arm shot out to bar his way while Fudge squawked and scrambled backwards in shock, thankfully his bellow had masked the sound of Harry's gasp as his lungs finally decided to start working again, he shook violently under Ron's arm, the red head shifting a bit closer and clamping a hand down on his shoulder beneath the cloak.

"THA' HARRY IS RESPONSIBLE FER ALL'A THIS?! THA' A TWELVE YEAR OLD BOY WOULD – I OUGHTTA – " he made a violent handmotion and stepped forward again, ignoring Dumbledore's arm against his stomach, only to fall silent when Mister Malfoy snorted nastily.

"Twelve isn't too different from thirteen," he retorted unpleasantly, eyeing the groundskeeper with a malicious smile. "How old *were* you when Headmaster Dippet – "

"I will never allow one of my students to be expelled without evidence of wrong-doing, Cornelius," Dumbledore interrupted severely, peering down his long crooked nose at the Minister who fidgeted a moment, looking guilty.

"Ahhh, but Dumbledore, there's nothing for you to allow, is there?" Malfoy interrupted with dark amusement, "Did you forget? You've been suspended as Headmaster of Hogwarts, there is *nothing* you can do to stop him," he explained triumphantly as Dumbledore went very very still.

"It is merely a precaution, Albus," Fudge pleaded quietly, like a child desperately seeking parental approval. "For the peace of mind of the public, once the Heir is caught, Mister Potter can resume his education at Hogwarts free and clear. But for now... The Ministry *must* be seen to do something, Albus. I hope you understand..."

"You are making a grave mistake, Cornelius," Dumbledore stated ominously, his eyes like chips of ice as he practically loomed over everyone in the room, even *Hagrid*, with the weight of his disapproval.

Fudge seemed to wilt even as he straightened up, "We shall see. Hagrid, if you would?" he asked, stepping to one side and gesturing to the door, "Auror Dawlish will escort you to the Ministry for processing while I speak to Madam McGonagall about Mister Potter."

Hagrid looked like he would have rather fed the Minister to Fluffy, piece by piece. "Yeh're a blithering idiot who ought go an' boil his head. 'Arry's a good lad. *Heir o' Slytherin*, an' I'm the Queen o' Tir-nan-ogg," he scoffed darkly, voice dripping with a vicious brand of bitter sarcasm that Harry had never heard from the groundskeeper before. "Yeh'll regret this day, mark me, yeh'll regret it!" he snarled as he stomped out.

Dumbledore carefully rolled the Order of Suspension up and tucked it into his sleeve, "Actions, like words, once taken cannot be reversed," he chimed in solemnly as he swept after the half-giant. "I hope you are prepared for the backlash, Cornelius," he stated benignly.

"Worry about yourself, Dumbledore," Malfoy sneered, "and where it is you're going to be sleeping from now on."

Dumbledore sniffed dismissively, "I will always worry about my students over myself, Lucius," he admonished mildly, "They need only reach out, and ask, and I shall do everything within my power to aid them."

The blond wizard scoffed, making clear what he thought of *that* sentiment as the former headmaster left the hut.

And with that, they left. The door swinging shut behind Minister Fudge, and Harry's legs giving out beneath him in disbelief and horror. The thud of his knees hitting the floorboards muffled by Fang's desperate keen as he scratched on the door between him and his person. Slowly, Ron stripped out of the invisibility cloak, his voice stuck somewhere between his throat and his chest, unable to even *think* as what just happened refused to sink in.

With absolutely *no* justification...

The Minister of Magic had expelled Harry Potter from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Ron swallowed, could he even *do* that? Just... ruin some kid's entire future because he wanted to without anyone able to say anything? Dumbledore could, had tried, would have tried, but couldn't because Malfoy's father had done *something* to make the board of governors dismiss the headmaster and

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He shuddered, grabbing his bestfriend's arm, "Harry," he croaked, "C'mon, we have to go! If Fudge shows up at the tower and we're not in there..." he trailed off, imagination wild with terror. If the Minister were willing to expel his bestfriend for just being a convenient target, then how would he react if Harry actually made it LOOK like he was the Heir? Wondering around after dark. He might throw him in Azkaban!

Somehow he managed to push, pull, drag, and cajole his insensate bestfriend up to Gryffindor Tower under the cover of the cloak, once into

Gryffindor Tower he just seemed to freeze, staring up at everything as if it were the last time he would ever lay eyes on it. Ron quickly pulled the cloak off and, breaking all forms of etiquette, shoved it into Harry's front pocket while trying not to cringe at how his brothers' would react to seeing him rummaging in a mate's pocket. Bad enough he had to put up with jokes about hunting for lose change from Malfoy, he didn't want to hear it from the twins, or the inevitable lectures from Percy about theft.

It wasn't a moment too soon as at that moment, the Portrait door swung open admitting a white faced, thin lipped Professor McGonagall and a stony faced Minister Fudge. Ron shifted protectively in front of Harry and glared at the Minister through his quivering lower lip. He'd lost Hermione, he couldn't – *wouldn't* – lose Harry now!

Professor McGonagall opened her mouth but Ron found himself cutting her off without thinking, "We already know. We were there, in Hagrid's house when Fudge explained it. We wanted to ask him about the Chamber, about when it opened last time. You *can't* expel Harry! Not just because he's a Parselmouth! That's not fair!" he shouted, gripping his bestfriend's shoulders tightly as if to shield him from their plans. He could feel Harry shaking, the faintest of hitches in his breath that he knew from experience with Ginny that heralded tears and felt something hot and ugly *boil* in his gut. "HE'S NOT THE HEIR! HERMIONE'S IN THE HOSPITAL WING AND HIS OWN MUM WAS A MUGGLEBORN! SO WHAT IF HE CAN SPEAK TO SNAKES? HE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HE COULD! HE JUST THOUGHT EVERYONE COULD DO IT! YOU CAN'T EXPEL HIM!"

"Ron? Professor? What's going on?"

The whole of Gryffindor Tower was awake now, stumbling down the stairs in their night clothes, rubbing sleep from their eyes or staring in confusion at the confrontation happening below. At the way Ron Weasley was curled protectively around a violently shaking Harry Potter, the Minister looking alarmed and ashen faced while Professor McGonagall looked suspiciously bright eyed and stony faced.

"P-perhaps we should take this else – " the Minister began only for the youngest Weasley son to blow up again, turning to his elder brother and pointing an accusing finger at the Minister.

"HE ARRESTED HAGRID FOR NO REASON AND NOW HE WANTS TO EXPEL HARRY JUST FOR BEING A PARSELMOUTH!" the red head bellowed, red faced and frantic, "HE CAN'T! IT'S NOT FAIR!"

"Life isn't fair, Mister Weasley!" the Minister suddenly interrupted with a snap, "Like it or not, Mister Potter has been expelled, and if you don't want to end up in a cell in Azkaban for obstruction of justice you'll quiet down and do as you're told!"

Murmurs and protests went up amongst the Gryffindors, always easy to rile and get worked up over a perceived injustice. Even those who had been playing with the idea of Harry being the Heir of Slytherin were getting wound up, this wasn't how it was supposed to be done, wasn't how it should be. Where was the trial, the evidence, the proof? Not even the Minister could expel someone, or throw them in Azkaban, without proof!

"DO IT THEN!" the red head roared, voice easily tearing through the clamour beginning to kick up in the tower, squaring up to now red faced Minister, his blood *roaring* in his ears, burning like fire under his skin. "GO ON THEN! ARREST ME! YOU SEEM TO BE DOING IT TO EVERYONE ELSE!"

"RON NO!" Harry suddenly yelled, grabbing him and yanking him backwards. "You can't! You can't! Hermione – someone has to – you have to stay and protect Hermione," he moaned quietly. "I'll go," he announced, loudly enough to be heard. "I'll go, just, leave Ron alone," he said, quickly shifting away from his friend as he tried to grab at him, Percy already down the stairs and catching his youngest brother before he could do something to *really* get in trouble.

"What – wait – Harry no! This isn't *fair*! He can't *do* this! Surely there are laws or something!" Ron protested as Harry shuffled over to McGonagall and Fudge.

"*I am the Law, Mister Weasley,*" Minister Fudge bit out severely, "and after this display, you should be thankful that I don't dismiss your father on the basis of your rebellious behaviour."

Ron went white then red with anger and fear, mouth fastening shut so hard his lips vanished while Percy looked like all his dreams and aspirations for the future had just shattered down around his ears. Whatever everyone else's facial expressions were, Fudge seemed to realise he had gone a step too far in a much too public location, he blanched a little and drew himself up, gesturing impatiently for Harry to hurry up out of the room and treating Professor McGonagall to a particularly sour look. She observed her lions for a moment before nodding her head (was that almost a smile?).

"Return to your dormitories, I will address this incident in the morning. Come along, Potter," she told them before her tone gentled considerably as she guided Harry out of the room.

He looked over his shoulder as he left, and Ron felt as if someone had clawed his stomach out when he realised Harry's cheeks were wet.

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Whether it was because he was secretly enjoying it, or he was taking out his annoyance and frustration with both Ron and Professor Dumbledore's attitudes towards his decision, but Minister Fudge seemed to take a malicious amount of satisfaction out of bringing Harry's loyal holly wand down over his knee, the loud crack tearing through the room almost like Harry fancied a gunshot would sound like. The broken hilt and shaft were unceremoniously slapped into his open palms as Harry stared down at them mutely, as he heard the Minister saying something to Professor McGonagall, whether he left then Harry didn't know because it was then that it all came crashing down on him.

He gripped his wand to his chest and crouched down, curling himself over it silently.

He had learned years ago to keep his grief quiet, to cry without making a sound. He had not yet fallen out of practice enough to let even the wail that clawed like a thing *alive* up his throat out. He gritted his teeth and silenced his snivelling even as his nose began to run and his eyes continued to burn and stream like a pair of taps not completely turned shut.

He could feel Professor McGonagall kneeling on the ground next to him, her thin but strong arms wrapping around him tightly, smelling of ink and parchment, lavender, and gingerbread. She stroked his head and didn't bother with useless empty platitudes as she let him cry himself out. She just held him until he could pull himself together.

"Come on Harry," she said gently, pulling back and leaving a chill where she had once been, "Your belongings will have been collected from the tower by now. We'll say goodbye to your friends, get some breakfast into you, then I'll... I will take you home," she explained, her voice wobbling ever so slightly.

Harry choked on a fresh well of tears, "This was my home," he croaked miserably, gripping his broken wand as if his hands were glued to it.

Her hands were gentle as she urged him off the floor, she didn't hurry him through the corridors as he plodded along slowly, pausing every now and again to absorb his surroundings, trying to engrave them in his memories before the beautiful dream of the last year and a half truly did fade and die completely. Minerva couldn't remember the last time Hogwarts had expelled a student, she knew there were at least two incidents after Hagrid had been dismissed, but she couldn't recall when. Both reasons for such an expulsion were warranted though, nothing no where *near* as frivolous, pointless, or *malicious* as simply possessing a frowned upon blood-borne talent. She seethed quietly in the recesses of her mind as somehow even Peeves sensed the sombre mood and paused long enough and quietly enough for Harry to say his goodbyes to the often disagreeable mischief maker.

Expelled for being a Parselmouth. She doubted it. She *highly* doubted it. Most people forgot, what with his constant hanging on the Floo for Albus' advise, what a manipulative cunning little *bastard* Cornelius Fudge could be. Oh, he was arrogant, stubborn, and both spineless and overly proud in equal and unhelpful measures, but he was no fool, no idiot, and he had the ability to think in the long term, to gain flashes of brilliance and insight decades before they would be useful. It was how he became Minister for Magic, how he gained the right to campaign to begin with. He started his political career early, barely half a decade out of Hogwarts, those early decisions, that brief flash of insight, took him to the top during his lack-lustre campaign that was only half-heartedly funded by his wife's widower of a father.

If he hadn't expelled Harry Potter as an attempt to curb a future threat to his political career, she would kiss Argus Filch full on the mouth!

Really! By the time Harry was in any position politically or even *physically* to campaign as Minister for Magic, Fudge would have retired or moved into the Wizengmot and thus been unable to even *hold* his office. It was, after all, illegal to be Minister and retain a seat.

She wasn't surprised to find most of Gryffindor House awake and waiting by the time they returned, it seemed as though Young Mister Weasley had given them all the complete run down of what had occurred and why – though how he knew she only had the vaguest of ideas. He had claimed to be present when the Minister arrested Hagrid, but the man himself had blustered about how he had seen neither hide nor hair of Mister Weasley or Potter within Hagrid's abode otherwise he would have handled Mister Potter's expulsion then and there and saved himself the harassment and disrespect of the youngest Weasley 'brat'.

She held a hand up to silence her Lions before they even began, "Stop. Mister Potter, Mister Weasley, all those relevant, take your goodbyes to the dormitories while I speak to the rest of your house," she commanded, gently giving Harry's shoulder a small squeeze as he nodded, subdued but now dry eyed as he quickly moved to Young Mister Weasley's side and took his

hand, pulling the scowling red head up the stairs to their dormitory. All of his yearmates, the Weasley Twins, Mister Percy Weasley, and the Gryffindor Quidditch team scrambling after him, anyone else was barred by a fierce Lee Jordan telling them to butt their ugly noses out as what happened up there was none of their business!

"No doubt Mister Weasley has informed you of what has occurred. But just to confirm, the Ministry of Magic has seen fit to step in on the Chamber of Secrets incident. The board of governors has decided to suspend the Headmaster regarding the current attacks due to lack of confidence. As a result, there was no one in a position of authority to argue the Minister's decisions regarding the school. Hagrid, whom I am sure many of you know and are fond of, was previously connected to the Chamber incident fifty years ago, a Prefect caught him raising an unknown magical creature in a cupboard and reported him. At the time, the common belief was that the creature had escaped containment and attacked the student populace and an unscrupulous supremacist took advantage of the situation to create panic. Never the less, Hagrid was expelled at the time. The Ministry decided that in order to handle the current incident, all individuals connected would be dealt with. As such, even though he possesses both mine and Headmaster Dumbledore's complete trust and confidence, Hagrid has been arrested and consigned to Azkaban Prison for the foreseeable future – "

"But Professor!" a sixth year piped up frowned, "Surely he got a trial? Right? They can't just decide he's guilty and throw him in without proof!"

"Unfortunately, Miss Dunvegan, the Minister for Magic *can*. During times of civil unrest he can move with autonomy outside the norm, originally it was so that the Minister could sign emergency laws into practice, and work for the betterment of Magical Britain should he ever feel his office was compromised in any way. With spells like *Imperio*, various compulsions, and even potions, it was a very real concern during times of war. However, due to administrative errors during You-Know-Who's last rise, the unrest, the sudden disappearance, and the political backlash from many prominent Pureblood families suddenly returning to their senses meant that the emergency procedures were never written off. Legally and Officially,

England is still in a period of civil unrest, thus giving the Minister complete control outside the bounds of the law over the population.

"As such, on top of arresting Hagrid without trial, Mister Potter has also been expelled from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry on the grounds of his Parselmouth abilities," she finally detailed with a heavy sigh. She expected the room to explode into protests, into shouting, confusion. The heavy silence was worse. It prompted her to explain further, she shouldn't open her mouth, but her lions deserved to know why one of their own was being persecuted, being thrown out, *exiled*. "Slytherin's monster is currently believed to be a serpent of some description. Mister Potter's parselmouth talents have brought a concern to the Ministry that he is perhaps the one controlling the monster. However, as Mister Weasley so effectively pointed out earlier, until the Duelling Club, Mister Potter was unaware he was even speaking another language, on top of his own less than pure lineage and continued association with Miss Granger, it is ludicrous to even consider him as the Heir of Slytherin. He is a *Gryffindor*. And whether or not he calls this castle home, *he always will be*," she declared strongly, glaring down the length of her nose at her lions as she drew herself up strongly.

Nods and calls of agreement went up amongst the students as looks were exchanged.

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The goodbyes between Mister Potter, his friends, and team did not take long. It was trying to pry Young Mister Weasley away from him that took the bulk of the pre-dawn hours, talking him out of leaving Hogwarts with him in a show of solidarity, of attacking the Minister in revenge. But Harry vetoed them, reminding him that someone had to stay and take care of Hermione, protect her; he would make it, he would manage. He'd been planning his escape from the Dursleys for years, it would be more difficult now that he had two years of muggle schooling to catch up on, but he had motivation now, and it wasn't like he was attending the same private school

as Dudley, so he didn't have to keep his scores lower than his idiot cousin. He would survive.

It broke her heart to chivvy him out of the tower, young Percy having to hold his little brother back and stop him from chasing after them as she took Harry away. Deciding to avoid the Great Hall, and no doubt the heckling of Slytherin House who were probably already aware of Mister Potter's expulsion thanks to that little albino toad Malfoy, she took him into the kitchens for breakfast.

He had clearly seen a House Elf before, though where she couldn't think of unless he caught sight of one of their own for whatever reason, so he didn't ask what they were as they were sat down and served a swift breakfast. They ate in silence, Harry too despondent to do anything more than nibble on his raspberry jam toast, and Minerva with her heart quietly breaking even further, unable to muster her house's famous courage to break the silence.

If Harry drew out his breakfast far longer than she knew he usually took, she didn't comment. Merely poured herself another tea and waited him out. Were it any other student she probably would have snapped at them to hurry it up, but she wasn't heartless. And this whole situation was *wrong* no matter which way one looked at it.

So she let him take his time, she let him gather himself, and when he was ready, they bade the kitchens behind and went to the small side-chamber next to the Great Hall, the same one that he had stood in over a year ago waiting to be Sorted. His trunk was waiting, along with Hedwig and her cage, the snowy owl hooting almost in askance as they came in.

Minerva closed the door behind them and knelt in front of the twelve year old, gripping his shoulders gently. He was so *young*, and *small*. James had never been this tiny, neither had Lily, not even in their First Years. Lily had actually been the taller of the two until they reached Fourth Year and the Gryffindor Boys all seemingly obtained their growth spurts at the same time, returning to school with an extra six inches of height to her two.

Severus had come close when in his first year, but even then he was a little taller, more filled out. Minerva had worried when young Harry stepped through those doors. She knew neglect when she saw it, and it was stamped on every inch of the poor child, the way he looked at others, the way he shied from attention both from the students and the teachers, his treatment of food, the people around him.

"We will be taking something called a Portkey back to Privet Drive. It will be a bit of a bumpy ride just to warn you. I will explain the situation to your relatives, and... lay down some *ground* rules for them. I know your home-life isn't as happy as you allow others to believe, but I will not allow you to come to harm, Harry. I will check on you as often as I can. No matter what, you're still one of my lion cubs," she explained softly and earnestly, as firmly as she could hoping that the tightness of her hold on his shoulders would convey her honesty.

Harry's smile was a shadow, a little wobbly, and gone like the wind. He didn't think he would ever be able to smile again.

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Originally I wanted to cut after Lucius and co left Hagrid's hut and jump to Privet Drive with Harry looking back on these scenes retroactively. Not as a flashback because I hate them, but just in summary. But Reighost insisted that we have the wand snapping scene, and then Ron happened and Minerva, so we now have this. Made inbetween trying to build Niflheim on Minecraft and getting lost down abandoned mining shafts.

But still, hope you guys enjoy this. There will be a lot of OCs, just to warn you, and I will have pictures and what not of them on my facebook page along with the Minecraft map of the school when I finish it. So far I'm still on the first floor and fighting with the left wing dormitories and headmistress's office. Yeah, I made myself an Author page on facebook since my account got suspended, I made a new one

but put my writing on a Page and kept my account private so check it out. I'll have regular status updates on there.

Just to warn you as well, I plan on taking this above and beyond Voldemort, there will be repercussions to this, and I'll be playing with a lot of aspects from those minor crossovers and bringing them into this fic. Hope you enjoy it and give me some feedback.

2. Chapter 2

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

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CHAPTER TWO

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Almost a week after his return, Harry fancied that if it hadn't been for the *very* menacing lecture Professor McGonagall gave both his Aunt and Uncle regarding how to care for a child, and the *dire* consequences she would enforce if they did not do so to her satisfaction, he was fairly certain that his life would have been a great deal worse under their roof. For one, the fact that she even followed through on her promise to check up on him only three days after she originally dropped him off, interrupting a dinner that Harry had not been invited to as he lay forlornly in his bedroom and

wallowed in depression, only reinforced the fact that their behaviour was going to be policed.

For now, Vernon was toeing the line and on his 'best' behaviour (best behaviour towards Harry involved ignoring his existence outside of making sure there was enough food to feed him as well as himself and his wife in the fridge). Though, that could *also* be because the Professor made a point of turning the sofa into a newt and coolly informed him that as a Transfiguration Mistress such a thing was child's play, but even easier for her to do the same to a human. After all, humans had more in common with an amphibian than a sofa. Vernon had gone almost translucent with mute terror at the not so subtle threat, his head nodding so vigorously it was a wonder it didn't come off.

The memory of that confrontation was probably the only reason the former Gryffindor didn't spend the *whole* week crying into his pillow, unable to be consoled – not that anyone in *this* house would have tried.

Hogwarts was still a raw, ragged wound in his chest. One that showed no indication towards healing just yet, or any time soon. He couldn't even hold onto the half-thought up bitter daydream of becoming Hagrid's assistant at Hogwarts if he was to ever be expelled, trailing after him and carrying his heavy bags and crossbow while Ron and Hermione continued on to become amazing sorcerers. Without him. But that daydream had gone up in flames before he even considered it a possibility in his current situation, Hagrid had been arrested and escorted off the school grounds before Harry had even gotten back up to Gryffindor Tower.

He didn't even understand what they meant by *expulsion* from magic school. Why would they snap his wand? It didn't belong to the Ministry, or the school. It was private property, they shouldn't have been able to destroy it like that. Having heard enough of Vernon's rants on the subject about how a man's possessions and home shouldn't be interfered with by the Government, he was well acquainted with the knowledge that Minister Fudge's actions would have never been allowed in the Muggle World. But in the magical one... was there some law preventing him from buying

another wand? Ollivander had mentioned that his parents had been in to buy their 'first' wands, did that mean they had more than one? What about his schooling? Was there some kind of law preventing Harry from attending a different school of magic? In the muggle world, if a student was expelled from one school, they just had to attend a different one as it was illegal for children under a certain age to be without a decent education. They could be homeschooled, but Harry didn't know if that was allowed for magical children. And who would he get to tutor him? And again, was he allowed to buy a second wand in order to get those lessons?

What about potions? Or Herbology, Astronomy, Divination, Care of Magical Creatures – was he barred from them as well? Or could he continue learning those subjects and using his magic with them as long as he didn't have a wand?

Had he been exiled *completely* from the Magical World?

Was he allowed into Diagon Alley anymore? Hagrid was allowed to come and go, but he had a job in the Magical World, a legitimate reason to continue living alongside them. What about his Vaults and money? Could he still access them so he could pay for his schooling elsewhere? (Could he use a second hand wand belonging to one of his parents, or other family members if one was in there? Neville used his dad's wand, and Ron used... Harry couldn't remember whose wand it was, Charlie's? Or one of his Great Uncle's? At least until it snapped, it worked fine for him.)

He didn't know. Maybe he should ask Professor McGonagall? He should write a list of questions to ask her, so he didn't forget.

Peeling himself out of his bedding where he had been wallowing, he dragged a sheet of parchment over and inked a quill. Perhaps it was a bit masochistic of him to continue using such things when he didn't really *have* to, but it felt like... it felt like giving up if he didn't. And no matter what anyone actually said about him, no one could claim he was a quitter. In fact, they would say he was more like a dog with a bone, once he got an idea into his head it was nigh impossible to pry it out, and he would end up pursuing

it to the ends of the earth. Or down dangerous trapdoors beneath narcoleptic Cerberi.

The most important questions went down first: Was he exiled entirely from the Magical World? Could he buy another wand, was it against the Law? Would he be allowed to attend a different magic school? Why did Fudge snap his wand when it was private property? Was he barred from Gringotts? Etc, etc.

It was just as he was writing his final question (Am I still allowed to brew potions outside of Hogwarts?) when he heard a tapping at his window sill.

Even though it was February and freezing cold, he kept it open at all times so that Hedwig could come and go, just in case he received a Ministry letter saying he could come back to Hogwarts, or a note from Ron telling him Hermione was awake and okay. Any normal owl would just fly through and land on his desk rather than wait politely on the window sill.

When he turned, he realised just why.

It wasn't an owl.

He wasn't even sure *what* kind of bird it was, or whether it was a bird at all. Well, *obviously* it was a bird, but he didn't know if it were an actual living creature.

It looked like a mix between a kestrel and a secretary bird, about a foot tall it was white and glowing, seemingly made of captured starlight, or glowing white mist. Harry had never seen anything like it. It stared at him motionlessly. Too motionlessly actually, Harry decided, feeling uncomfortable. No *living* thing was ever that still. Was it even breathing?

Warily, he got to his feet and approached it. As he got closer, he realised that he could see *through* it a little. It really wasn't a living creature. Then he noticed that the... he wasn't sure, it looked like mist or steam, but it was *filled* with tiny glowing runes. So that was why it looked like starlight,

every individual rune was glowing white and drifting lazily throughout the bird.

Warily, he held a hand out for it so he could take it to Hedwig's perch. Delicately, the magic bird stepped onto his hand, and then *shattered*.

The runes seemingly just falling away like glitter or rain, the delicate bird crumbling on his hand with runes cascading to the floor where they faded out of existence, leaving a small wooden scroll in his palm.

Harry gaped in astonishment, his room oddly dull and dark now without the ethereal light cast by the magical bird.

Was it some kind of messenger bird made of magic?

He looked down at the scroll, it was small with double cylinders tied together with a dark red ribbon. The wooden handles looked almost like sword hilts and possessed etchings of flowers and swirls, tiny chips of moonstone set in the tips of the handles. It was very pretty, only about six or seven inches long, and the paper was a very pale ivory coloured parchment that was *much* finer than anything he had ever found in Scibbulus Writing Instruments.

Who on *earth* would be writing him on such fancy paper, let alone using such a unique, if beautiful, method of delivery?

Warily, he pulled the ribbon off and set it on his desk, unrolling both sides of the school to look at the message within. At the top of the page there were delicate decorative illustrated borders of magic-like swirls done in golden ink, and delicate five-petal star-like flowers in rubies, emerald, and sapphire colours. He'd seen designs like that on Mrs Number Eight's exotic tea sets from the far east, he couldn't remember if it was Turkish or somewhere else, but they had been very beautiful, even if Aunt Petunia had been thoroughly disapproving of something so foreign being served in a British Household.

In elegant black script beneath a small coat of arms depicting a staff crossed with a hammer across a book bearing one of those star-shaped five petal flowers was something that made Harry's heart stutter in his chest.

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY OF MAGICAL PRACTICES

Headmistress: Catherine Winter

Deputy Headmistress: Artemis Riveths

Dear Mr Potter,

Niflheim Academy is pleased to inform you that as of February the 15th you have reached the required magical standards to begin an education within our academy, should you so desire to join us. As such, we at Niflheim Academy of Magical Practices would like to invite you to one of our Open Days this spring.

Included with this letter is our standard Student Prospectus, a brochure regarding the grounds, and further information leaflets detailing how to reach us, and, should you wish, how to accept or decline our invitation.

We hope to see you at our Open Day.

Kind regards,

*Artemis Riveths
Deputy Headmistress*

He had been invited to a new school.

Numbly, he reread the letter with increasing near-hysteria. He had been accepted into a *new school!*

Eagerly he unrolled the scroll even further, collecting the small handful of papers that slipped out and the thin paperback book with them. One of the

leaflets showed a white and blue-green coloured castle perched atop a glacier somewhere cold and white, smothered in snow, with high spires and blue roofs, a jutting fang of rock stretching out from the glacier just beneath the school almost like a muggle battle-ship's flight deck. Other pictures inside showed students in thick fur-lined parkas on dog sleds, or riding reindeer or other clearly magical creatures Harry had never seen before. The uniforms were all black and red, and he goggled to see a *centaur* wearing a very modified version of one to fit his form, it seemed as though the school was not *just* for human magic users. Now that he was paying better attention, he saw a girl with golden skin and four arms in the background of one picture, next to her was a goblin wearing the school uniform, they were laughing along happily with an almost *dragon*-looking girl that had wings and horns and even a snub-nosed snout.

He eagerly read through the text of the leaflet, boasting of the school's diverse multi-racial nature, their facilities catering to all unique peoples and circumstances, quotes from students in the past about how the school helped them interspaced throughout the text. A centaur girl explaining how she damaged her spine and couldn't use her backlegs, no magic could help with her injuries, so the school provided her with a specialised wheelchair and enchantments on the stairs that allowed her to attend all of her classes without any problems. A deaf student who gushed about how the teachers set him up with a magically modified muggle voice to text computer that would write all of the teacher's lectures down for him.

It was a safe facility built around one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge, a legendary library built in time-unknown before humanity were even scrabbling out the mud on all fours, with every scrap of information ever discovered impartially recorded by a dedicated enclave of the ancestors of present day House Elves and magically created 'Sendings' – whatever they were – and constantly updated every year with knowledge both magical, muggle, human, and non-human. The leaflet didn't explain what a Sending was, but apparently they were the primary record keepers with the 'House Elves' going out and collecting the information and books. Beholden to absolutely no Government or Ministry, the school operated with international impunity, a true neutral zone in thanks to ancient Nordic

treatise and geas that were *still* going strong even today. With the school wards linked into the Repository as well, there was absolutely *no chance* of the school being attacked, breached, or discovered by unwelcome parties, governments, armies, or muggles. It would take erasing the entirety of Svalbard off the world map to bring the wards down, and even then, the Repository extended deep below sea-level and down past even the ocean floor. Chances are it would survive no matter what. It had already outlasted several species, the sinking of Atlantis (according to the flyer, Svalbard had once actually *BEEN* Atlantis. Sunk in a catastrophic backlash of magic, the Repository survived, and over the years, possibly with outside help, no one was quite certain and the records had yet to be unearthed from the Repository's lower levels, the land resurfaced, sans ruins, in time for the Norse to stumble upon it and 'discover' the land mass they dubbed 'Niflheim' after their religious beliefs; hence why the Headmistress chose the name of the school, apparently it was something of an inside joke), the extinction of the dinosaurs, multiple near-world destroying incidents, and just about every single large scale magical war waged to claim it by magical civilisations of the Northern Hemisphere, and a few even from the Southern (unfortunately the African Mages froze to death before they could truly begin their own campaign, they had not been prepared for Svalbard's bitter winters when they finally made shore. Warming charms, or the ancient equivalent, just were not going to cut it).

Hermione would have given her left leg to attend a place like this, Harry decided, a little choked up at the reminder of his friend as he looked up another leaflet, this time boasting about the school building, grounds, classes, and teachers.

Apparently, Niflheim accepted any student, regardless of nationality, gender, and species. Schooling could begin *whenever*, no matter what the age, as long as the prospective student had reached a particular level of magical strength. After that, they would have until the year of their twentieth birthday to take their final examinations in their chosen fields, and graduate from the school. Scholars could petition to have access to the Repository and board within a special wing of the school, but they had to have permission, and were often heavily encouraged to help the students

with their own learning. Many a scholar of obscure magic had actually found promising apprentices amongst the students during their tenures within the Repository. Detentions were not the simple mind-numbing writing of lines, but rather educational punishments to better teach students how to care for themselves upon graduation, helping in the kitchens, laundry, classroom and toilet cleaning, maintaining the grounds, mucking out the animal pens, amongst other things. They possessed many and varied excellent student clubs and committees, the Flying Club and the Library Exploration Committee being the most popular, with Technomancy coming in a very close second.

There were six mandatory classes for first years, of which only Mind Magics had to be taken for a single year but continued further if desired. Runo – the discipline of using Spirits or Outer Magic of the world around them; Music – Niflheim Academy was world famous for producing the greatest masters of Musically based magic, tying it into several different magical disciplines on top of using it as a branch of magic in its own right; Potions – a fairly nondescript class but in recent years the school's Potions classes had been gaining wide recognition for its rapid improvement under the master Alchemist Roger Bacon; History – with the Repository at their fingertips, it was to absolutely no one's surprise that the History course of Niflheim could not be beaten by any other known educational establishment; and lastly, Galdrastafur – Runic magic, another course in which they dominated most other schools the world over with only the Chinese and Egyptains beating them out, if only for flexibility.

Other courses were Battle Magic, Physical Defence (something else that had been gaining recognition for the school), Arithmancy, Enchantments, Astronomy/Astrology, Elements (a class dedicated to wielding elemental magic without a foci), Herbology/Botany, Care of Magical Creatures, Languages (of which they offered over two hundred both magical and muggle), Talismen and Sprites, Healing, Warding, and Divination.

Harry frowned as he looked over the courses. There were no electives for Transfiguration or Charms. Now why was that? They were so essential in terms of magic, they seemed to be everywhere, in every thing, in the

magical world. Or the British one, he supposed. Looking at the small synopses of each class, he guessed Enchantments was something akin to Charms, but he couldn't see anything like Transfiguration. He would just have to study that in his own time then, given how it was something his father had excelled at, and Professor McGonagall taught, he didn't want to let them down by not learning as much as he could.

He skimmed through the student prospectus (printed on magazine quality muggle paper instead of parchment) which told him pretty much the same information as the leaflets did, but also possessed tiny profiles on each of the teachers, and detailed various famous alumni. When he came to the bio of the Potions teacher he felt his mouth open and his stomach drop down to his toes.

Roger Bacon, also known throughout Europe as Nicholas Flamel

The Potions Professor at Niflheim was Nicholas Flamel? The man he had supposedly killed last year by failing to protect the Philosopher's Stone? But... Dumbledore told him he'd died...

Harry stared at the picture of the odd shrivelled up old man grinning up at him. Unlike with most magical books, and leaflets, none of the papers from the school possessed moving pictures. Nicholas Flamel was apparently a fake name that Roger Bacon had adopted in order to avoid the frantic man-hunts from the Vatican who had attempted to incarcerate him as a heretic some four centuries ago. Apparently, he was still a known quantity to them and it was only in the last century that they had relaxed their frothing 'heresy' bile to not try to kill him. He was noted to be an old friend of the Hyuga teachers, an elderly woman with snow white hair and a kind smile, and a young man with wild brown hair and eerie amber-red eyes that did not look human in the slightest. Apparently they were married. Harry eyed the pictures with some trepidation. Such an old lady and a young man? That was... creepy. Though, he supposed the young man could be one of those non-humans that didn't age like other people did. He could be even older than she was, he didn't know. Their ages weren't listed. But it did say that he was a long term friend to Roger Bacon.

He could see other non-humans amongst the staff pictures as well, the Deputy Headmistress, Miss Artemis Riveths was *staggeringly* beautiful. Too much so to be human, and she possessed pointed ears, the skin around her temples and cheekbones having the faintest pearlescent shimmer of what looked like fish scales. The Air Elements teacher was a woman with skin so dark it looked like black obsidian, and pupil-less golden yellow eyes. The Divination teacher was one of those dragon-looking people, while the History teacher was a rather young looking Dwarf with a thick golden beard and violently blue runic tattoos patterning every inch of visible skin.

At the back of the prospectus were a number of parchment pages, it explained that the following pages had a list of dates and times for potential Open Days and that if he wished to attend one, he need only cross the date he wished to attend out, every parchment was linked and the choices of other prospective students would be visible thus allowing for no double booking. The final page was a form that upon being filled out and torn from the book would automatically turn into a 'Messenger Sending' and return to the school with his decision.

Laying the prospectus down he quickly grabbed his quill and checked the list of dates and times. The earliest was next week on the twenty fourth, and it hadn't yet been crossed through like the twenty third or the twenty sixth. He quickly drew a thick black line through the date and breathed a sigh of relief when it sank neatly into the paper and a flicker of runes lit up along the border of the page. Turning the page, he eyed the form. It *looked* fairly standard, asking for his name, date of birth, former school, current residence, though it did ask for his currently registered hospital or doctors office. There was also an extra little bit asking if he had any particular special needs.

Harry filled it in slowly, putting a small note beside the hospital question saying that he didn't know and had never actually been to one in memory, but the school nurse at Hogwarts would probably have some kind of record for him. In the special needs box though... He debated whether or not to write what he wanted to say before sighing and deciding to take the risk. He would never get anywhere without saying it.

"My wand was snapped, I don't know if I'm allowed another one as I was expelled." He considered telling them that Voldemort was alive, and probably plotting to kill him, but figured he should probably tell them in person and explain what happened properly and send them in Dumbledore's direction to confirm it. Hell, even Nichola- Roger Bacon's as it had been *his* stone Harry nearly died for.

Signing it off by ticking the box saying he was interested in attending the Open Day, he carefully pulled the parchment out of the prospectus.

Almost immediately it glowed and Harry yanked his hand back. Runes surged up off the page like a leaf storm, swirling up in a tight whirlwind that gradually grew brighter before it glowed blindly bright and settled down to a soft shimmer. Harry squinted open his eyes, having shut them against the radiant blare of light. Stood on his desk was another one of those glowing birds.

It stared at him a moment before bobbing and immediately launching itself off his desk, taking flight out of the open window just as Hedwig swooped in, making the owl shriek in surprise as she backwinged and flailed to avoid a collision. The bird didn't pause and suddenly shot upwards, almost vertically, and was lost amongst the clouds.

Harry stared after it before the uncontrollable grin once again split his face.

He had been accepted into a new school. He *had* to tell Ron!

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Name: Harry James Potter

Date of Birth: 31 July 1990(1)

Species: Human

Former/Current school: Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry – Gryffindor House

Current Residence: Number 4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey, SR11 9HO, United Kingdom

Currently registered Hospital/Doctor's Sugery: I've never been to one that I can remember. But Madam Pomfrey the nurse at Hogwarts has some records.

Special Requirements (Wheelchair access, assisted learning, etc): My wand was snapped, I don't know if I'm allowed another one as I was expelled.

There was a lot you could learn about someone from their handwriting, Headmistress Winter knew. Reading through the paper sent by young Mister Potter she could see his disbelief, desperation, and anxiousness all rolled into the smooth streaks of ink and messy spiky hand writing. She hadn't known he had been expelled from Hogwarts at the time of the letter being sent, though perhaps she should have – there had been an incident with a visiting scholar attempting to gain deeper access to the Repository than was agreed by attempting to seduce one of the Librarians. She had personally escorted the scholar back to his country of origin and filed formal charges against him, thus had not been paying much attention to the international news scene. She would need to correct this.

What remained now was to find out exactly *why* Mister Potter had been expelled. She would not tolerate a miniature Dark Lord in training within her school, the risk to the Repository was too great, and not to mention their students and staff. If any Dark Lord had the faintest idea of just whom was teaching their Physical Defence and Healing Classes... Never mind the kind of students they attracted. They had royalty attending the school at present!

She reached for her intercom, "Artemis, do you have a moment?" she asked after punching in the appropriate runes that would put her in contact with the Deputy Headmistress.

There was a long moment that Catherine patiently waited out before she heard the other woman's voice, "I believe I can spare twenty minutes at present before needing to check in on our Student Mentors. Shall I come to you?" the woman's almost lyrical voice asked.

"Please do. And if you could, pick up the recent issues of magical newspapers in England and Europe over the last two weeks from the Repository," she requested idly. With Mister Potter's status as a symbol within the United Kingdom it would be to no surprise that his expulsion would have made the papers, perhaps she could glean some manner of knowledge from them before she endeavoured to contact the school herself. If not only to find out, but also to obtain his school records and medical files. Most European newspapers were not worth the rags they were printed on given how deeply tied to their respective Ministries they were, propaganda and cover-ups were frequently run on front pages. So while she wouldn't trust one of those papers any further than she could perhaps throw a mountain without magic, there was always some grain of truth amidst the pigswill. Something she could use to open further conversation with her Hogwarts contemporaries.

Sighing deeply, Catherine waved a hand to the fireplace on the far side of the room, encouraging it to greater heights and heat, allowing the warmth to wash through the room as if sinking into a hot bath. February was dreadfully bitter, and while the school was well designed and generally kept well heated via ancient roman methods of heated floors, plenty of fireplaces, and various runes built into the walls designed to retain heat, the corridors were just always that shade too chilly for comfort at this time of year. Enough to prompt even her to don a sweater outside her rooms.

Someone knocked on the door and it was the work of a mere thought for it to swing open, admitting a stunningly beautiful woman inside.

Artemis Riveths was possibly almost as old as Catherine herself, maybe even older, both women were not exactly the chatty types when it came to their personal history, and their friendship was a simple warm thing that required no deep secrets or confessions of the past. Catherine herself was *considerably* older than most would assume at first glance, her features were ageless while being mature, snow white hair she kept braided back, and flint-grey eyes, her face was lined and dignified with a beak-like nose and high cheekbones. She favoured simple clothing of tunics and trousers,

thick comfortable boots, and multiple layers. She would not have looked out of place in a history book about the Vikings.

Opposite her, Artemis couldn't have been more different. The Finnish/Greek woman was half-Veela half-Water Nymph, her hair was a silvery butter-like blonde that tumbled down her back in loose waves and curls, her skin a pale peach white with the faintest shimmer of pearly scales framing her face and mother-of-pearl coloured eyes. Her clothing tastes were elegant and almost ethereal, making her look like a woman out of time in the soft silvery dove-grey gown she wore. Under her arm were the papers Catherine requested.

"I take it Mister Potter has replied to his Open Day invitation?" Artemis questioned as she approached, dress swishing faintly against the stone floors, the faintest peek of white slippers seem under the hem.

Catherine nodded to her oldest friend, "Indeed. He has confessed to his expulsion and I find myself at a loss of how to proceed without knowing more. I was too busy handling our latest debacle to pay much attention to the papers this week," she admitted solemnly as Artemis set the papers down on her expansive desk and conjured a chair made of ice to sit on. Well used to the Deputy Headmistress's antics, Catherine ignored it and suppressed her grimace. It was cold enough in here, she did not *need* to summon any more ice into the room.

"Allow me to save you the headache of wading through that tripe then," the blonde offered as she began to sift through the papers, "It seems as though Mister Potter's expulsion and the reasons for it were a tad too public for the British Minister to silence. The students of Hogwarts have contacted an independent newspaper, often accused of being little more than a conspiracy tabloid, and provided Penseive memories as well as interviews. You are familiar with the Quibbler, yes?" she asked, presenting the chosen newspaper to her friend.

Catherine nodded as she took it and laid it across her desk, scanning the headlines, "Of course. I followed Diana Lovegood's potions column quite enthusiastically. Her accident was truly a tragedy," the Headmistress

lamented as she scanned through the paper and nodded, "Xenophilus seems to have lost more of himself to his First Sight, I should have pushed his father a little more firmly about bringing him in for training. First Sight is not something you leave untrained or attended," she sighed.

Artemis made no sound of agreement or disagreement, they both knew her thoughts on those parents who refused their childrens' opportunity to attend for asinine reasons such as 'family tradition'.

The white haired woman set the paper down with a sigh once she was finished, "A delicate situation it seems," she observed before humming thoughtfully, "But it changes little," she decided before reaching for a clean sheet of paper and beginning to write. "Artemis, I would like for you to be in charge of Mister Potter's visitation. It is likely that he will opt to attend no matter what, but I would like for him to believe it is the *best* option, not merely his *last* option. If you can, see if you cannot convince his current Guardians to sign over their rights, with the British Ministry's behaviour it would most likely be safer for Mister Potter if he were completely removed from them," she explained with a dark frown. If there was one thing she abhorred more than anything else in the world, it was child abuse. That a Government was the one perpetrating it meant nothing, she had erased Governments before in her more wild days, she had no fear of those deluded insects. She would remove any child from an abusive situation and place them under her care if she found out about their poor circumstances. At present she already had twelve children under her personal care, several of whom were the younger siblings of students currently in attendance who had not yet met the power requirements to become students themselves.

Artemis nodded, climbing to her feet and gathering the newspapers in order to be returned, "I shall do my utmost," she promised and made a mental note to review the Student Mentors in their meeting later for the one best suited towards Mister Potter. Given his age, his student mentor would need to be much more hands on, and carefully picked. Niflheim had never had a student as young as him before, that would likely breed resentment amongst the other students, so she had best pick carefully.

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And another Chapter done!

Next chapter should see Harry's Open Day and the introduction of more Ocs, his student mentor, and a bit of exploration of the grounds and school. Fun times.

(1) Harry's birthdate: I bumped it up a decade to better make use of pop-culture and technological advancements in the 2000's as I remember very little of the 90's.

3. Chapter 3

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

I do not own Harry Potter, Abhorsen, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, or Monster Hunter. I'm just playing with them.

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CHAPTER THREE

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What a depressingly *dull* little neighbourhood.

Artemis sniffed delicately as she stalked down the filthy pavement towards their new prospective student's home. She knew full damn well she was turning heads so hard that one or two possibly would suffer neck problems, and more than a few would have marriage problems, but that was *hardly* her concern. No, her only concern was the little boy on the second floor whose magic was rippling out to her like the broken surface of a puddle disturbed

by a frightened tadpole. By nature, Veela were somewhat empathetic, combine that with the years of dedicated study into Mind Magics, Artemis had the best developed empath abilities that she had ever encountered outside of a Key, or a Noram – a natural born empath that was more spirit than human.

Outwardly, with its neatly maintained frost-bitten flowerbeds, damp and muddy lawn, and frost limed driveway, the house was just as common and plebeian as all of its neighbours. But to those who knew how to look... The paint upon the guttering gleamed as if new, the seals around the windows were still firm and springy, the door as handsome as it was when first installed, the roof tiles clean of lichen and moss. Magic had made itself home in this place, and protected it in what small ways it could. They were so weak, it was all they *could* do she realised in faint dismay and scornful disgust.

Protection Wards based around intent and anchored in a blood connection, with the strength of the wards dependent upon mutual intentions and emotionally charged feedback. She refrained from grimacing, but only just. A botched familial protection ward, improperly applied, and only half-executed, left to stagnate without being fully 'unwrapped' as it were.

That, more than anything, told her what kind of mess she was about to step into.

Mister Potter's homelife was not likely to be a pleasant one, and she was going to need a few moments to ensure her emotional control was up to the task of not doing anything that Catherine would be severely displeased with her over.

Under the guise of checking her purse, she delved into her mind magics and spent a few moments fortifying herself as she rummaged a folder out from her various papers and essentials, ignoring the stares and twitching curtains of the natives. She was probably the most interesting thing to have appeared in this neighbourhood in decades, she decided as she finally straightened up. Though all they could see was her long pale aqua coloured coat and

smart heeled boots, underneath that she had opted for a smart skirt-suit, dark iron grey, with an ivory white blouse, black tights, boots, and a silver broach bearing the school's crest, a wand crossed with a familiar Dwarven made one-handed hammer. Her long hair neatly clipped back, and her face only bearing the faintest of make-up to cover her scales, she had made no other effort to hide her other-worldliness beyond a simple illusion over her ears to blunt their points to something less dramatic, and more easily passed over.

Marching up to the door, she pressed the bell and waited.

The woman who answered had a mess of ward-threads loosely knotted around her in such an unsightly tangle that it was almost offensive to the eye. Like someone's crochet supplies after half the alley-cat population had spent an afternoon playing with it.

"Mrs Dursley?" she asked, instead of commenting on the awful state of her home's protective wards.

The woman's face was sour, as if she had eaten a lemon, skin and all, staring at her, "Yes, may I help you?" she asked politely, eyes flicking up and down her form and finding herself coming up short by comparison. Not for the first time, Artemis mentally cursed her Veela blood, the aura that they possessed could not wholly be suppressed, and it caused difficulties in many social situations with those who had no mind magic abilities or training, non-magicals and those who had no skill in Occlumency, though young children before puberty were safe. Heterosexual women, unless very secure in their relationships, almost to a total became hostile and argumentative for the sake of being argumentative towards her, the same with some homosexual men though it was less frequent. So while her aura was an attractant to heterosexual men, and homosexual women, it was an aggressive repellent to others. With perhaps only those on the asexual and demi spectrum being immune to her mere presence.

"I am Deputy Headmistress Riveths, may I come in and speak with you and your husband?" she asked politely.

Reluctantly, the woman allowed her into the house. Artemis was mildly impressed, the young woman had been raised with impeccable manners to ignore the repelling effects of her aura to such a degree. She showed her where to hang her coat and escorted her to the living room before taking her preference for tea and vanishing into the kitchen to collect her husband and the needed acquaintances.

Vernon Dursley was... shockingly unhealthy to her eyes, especially when compared to her colleagues, especially Teacher Hyuga who taught Physical Defence, or Teacher Vali who taught History. And much more beholden to his baser instincts than his wife, with far less control. Mrs Dursley could do better, the Veela/Nymph decided frostily as the man fell under her sway without even needing to meet her eyes. His face became slack and overly interested in the way of all simpletons, while his eyes became much brighter and almost manic by comparison.

"Miss Riveths, I presume?" he asked, all charm and slime as he swaggered into the room, seemingly ignorant to how his waistline swung with his movements, his moustache quivering with his obvious interest.

"Laerer Riveths," she corrected him, getting to her feet and extending a hand to shake. She did not wish for him to know her personal name, instead, she gave him her title as Teacher in Norwegian, the national language of Svalbard. All students would be expected to learn it, but there were universal translation charms upon the school so that those multinational students needn't worry about communication difficulties until they had complete mastery of the school's native tongue.

"Laerer, lovely name," he praised, taking her hand and turning it over to kiss. She slipped it free before his lips even brushed her hand.

"My title," she corrected gently, "And please, such actions are not acceptable between a married man and a woman not his wife in my culture. I hope you understand," she lied soothingly as she retook her seat, crossing her ankles and leaning against the armchair's side.

"Of course, of course!" Vernon blustered amiably as he took a seat on the sofa, his disapproving and tight-lipped wife sitting next to him, a shade too close to be proper. Insecure with her husband acting in such a manner. She offered the woman the shadow of an apologetic look, and was somewhat gratified to see her at least a little mollified. "What can we do for you, Laerer? I am a national champion at Golf and have numerous boxing medals, if it is of interest?" he boasted, lying through his teeth and drawing looks of stunned confusion and disbelief from his wife.

Artemis smiled tightly, "As I informed your wife, I am Deputy Headmistress of a very select boarding school – "

"And you want our Dudley to attend, eh? Well he's at Smeltings right now, a fine school, I founded it myself!" the man continued, another outrageous boast falling from his lips, completely heedless to his wife's shocked call of his name.

Artemis frowned, she had been unaware of another magical child, she dove back into her handbag and began to rummage for papers. But no, there was no record of a Dudley upon the prospective students – not even amidst Catherine's adoptees. She frowned, then... they were completely unaware of the situation.

She hummed, eyes flicking towards the door where, yes now she could see him.

"Mister Potter? Could you please join us in the living room?" she called gently, watching him jump from the corner of his eye, yanking his hands away from the bannister bars as if burnt. He floundered from where he had been eavesdropping on the staircase before slowly uncurling himself and creeping down the stairs towards them. She smiled encouragingly at him as he edged his way into the room, looking nervous, his magic roiling with anxiousness and the faintest after taste of hope. "Come child, sit, it seems as though there has been a slight miscommunication," she explained as she gestured him into the other arm-chair.

Her eyes narrowed when she realised he very carefully skirted out of armsreach from his uncle as he made his way to it, but didn't yet sit, glancing worriedly at his Aunt who, with her expression pinched and now downright hostile, stiffly nodded her head the slightest of millimetres. The child gingerly sat upon the very edge of the seat and now alarms were screaming throughout the Deputy Headmistress's mind.

If the tangle of wards upon Petunia Dursley were a mess, they were nothing compared to the riot that ensnared her nephew.

She opened her empathy for all of a heartbeat, and wished she hadn't almost immediately.

Disgust, revulsion, bitterness, envy, jealousy, hurt, longing, nostalgia, love, hate – Petunia Dursley was a mess of conflicting emotions and pain in regards to her nephew.

Her husband held nothing but revulsion, fear, and loathing for the child sat to her side.

And the boy... her heart quivered within her chest. Wariness, hurt, sadness, confusion, anxiousness, hesitancy, hope, he was almost as tangled in his emotions as his aunt but not nearly so tormented by them.

The mess with the wards became only too clear with that small peek into their abysmal family dynamic. The protections were tied between Mister Potter and Mrs Dursley, the more Mrs Dursley was determined to protect her nephew, the stronger they would be. The wards were barely functioning and had not even fully connected. She had not taken her nephew in willingly, but she took him all the same. And the resentment that bred had not allowed the wards to completely anchor themselves, coupled with the love she felt being bitter and tainted with jealousy and hurt, they were not very strong. They would perhaps protect the house from water damage, premature aging, and interest from thieves or other people, allowing Accidental Magic to go without notice, but they would, in no way, prevent a wizard with nefarious intentions from gaining entry.

That was what the other wards were for. Attached to the failing protection ward, there were wards for invisibility, mail re-direction (if they had attempted to use any other method of communication beyond Messenger Sending, it would have been redirected to locations and persons unknown), and one of the strongest Notice-Me-Nots keyed towards anti-social behaviour that she had ever encountered in Europe outside of Dark Magic areas.

She reached for the cup of tea Mrs Dursley had provided her with and took a deep mouthful to steady herself.

Wards aside, she had a job. One that was now even more important than she had previously considered. Mister Potter *had* to attend Niflheim, for his own well being, and if not attend, then at least have his Guardianship signed over to Catherine, she would find him a fine school else where if that was his desire but he could *not* stay in this environment!

"Allow me to start from the top," she began, "I am Artemis Riveths, Deputy Headmistress of Niflheim Academy of Magical Practices," she announced, shrewdly watching Mrs Dursley. Her husband was thoroughly sedated under her aura and would do little more than smile dumbly and lie about his accomplishments in an effort to look good to her, it was a common enough problem that affected individuals without mental shields. The woman went white, then red with anger, her lips vanishing into a thin puckered line, but she seemed to know her limits and where the line was drawn. She didn't speak.

"Last week, we sent Mister Potter our customary invitation to a school Open Day as he had managed to reach the needed magical requirements to attend. He accepted and booked his visitation for today, however, the Headmistress and I were under the impression this was done with your knowledge and acceptance. I apologise for any undue alarm I may have caused you because of this. Rare is the student who takes responsibility for themselves in such a manner," she explained stiffly, icing her temper as she sipped the tea. That the child in question had not even *considered* speaking

to his Guardians about such a decision spoke very poorly as to his circumstances, and his faith in authority figures.

"My Aunt and Uncle... they don't like magic, I didn't want to bother them," Harry justified quietly, fiddling with the fraying hem of what she had at first assumed was a favourite T-shirt given how ratty and worn out it was. Knowing the emotions behind the facade of this family though gave her a different idea as to just where the over-large red T-shirt may have come from, and in what state it reached the child next to her.

She hummed thoughtfully, "There are arrangements set aside for such cases, but I believe they are best discussed at a later time. Your Open Day appointment still stands, Mister Potter, if you are interested – "

"Yes! Yes I am! Please!" he interrupted, nearly jumping to his feet with desperation.

She chuckled and waved him down, "Calm child. And please, do not interrupt again. It is considered disrespectful and will earn you a detention should you decide to enrol. Now, I have *your* interest, undoubtedly. However, the permission of your Guardians is – "

"He shan't be going," Mrs Dursley interrupted sharply. "I'll not waste the money on his attending *another* freak school just to get thrown out! Or have that crack pot old fool come knocking on our door, threatening my Dudders, to demand I take him back in!" she flared, her voice breaking in her anger.

Harry wilted where he was sat, and Artemis drew herself up. "We have provisions for Scholarship loans, you needn't spend a penny, Mrs Dursley. The debts accrued will be the responsibility of Mister Potter, he will either earn student credit to lessen it, or upon reaching a place of employment with a certain pay-bracket begin to pay off his debt in small increments. Much like your Student Finance Loans for university students," she explained primly with narrowed eyes, "And I have no idea whom this 'crack pot old fool' is, but there are steps that can be taken with our legal department to ensure you receive no harassment from those searching for Mister Potter," she promised.

"You'll be able to get rid of me for the year as well, it's a boarding school as well," Mister Potter suddenly pointed out before glancing at her nervously, "And it's in another country too, so... um... I'll be even further away?" he offered, seemingly confused about how to further encourage his Aunt into letting him go.

She took a deep breath and got to her feet, "Would you and your husband like to join us on the tour of our facilities? We will ultimately speak with the Headmistress about Harry's circumstances under your roof, you can certainly bring any issues, questions, or grievances up with her and we will do our best to rectify them," she offered, delicately brushing lint from her skirt.

Petunia was a hair away from refusing, practically swelling in her seat with fury.

"Why not? Sounds like an adventure!" Vernon suddenly exclaimed, climbing to his feet, completely ignorant to the look of utter betrayal on his wife's face. "Why, the last time I went down the Nile River I wrestled crocodiles, they didn't call me the next Steve Irwin for nothing!" he bragged.

Artemis ignored him, "Mister Potter, I do not want you to be under the impression that Niflheim is your only option, there are a great many magical schools the world over. Should you not find Niflheim to your liking, then contacting one of them is well within your rights. Please bare that in mind."

He nodded gingerly, looking uncertain, "Yes ma'am."

She nodded and withdrew a long length of cord from her purse, "The weather in Svalbard at the moment is in the minus twenty range, I would recommend digging out some winter clothing. I will give you a talisman to combat the worst of the cold, but it does work best with something to base itself on," she explained and watched as Vernon Dursley cheerily ushered his wife into the hallway and up the stairs to gather the needed clothing,

Mister Potter following quickly behind to his own bedroom where he proceeded to bang around for a while.

Artemis sighed deeply and finished off her tea. This was even more of a mess than she thought it would be.

Their youngest student, and currently their most complicated problem. She sincerely hoped Catherine was having better luck getting hold of his records and the reason for his expulsion out of Hogwarts.

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"You allowed him to face down a *Cerberus at eleven?!*"

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Harry was trying very hard not to jitter himself into dropping the apparently magical cord Miss Riveths gave him. Sorry, *Laerer* Riveths. She had explained when he came stumbling down the stairs in both of his Weasley sweaters, old school robe thrown over them, and his winter cloak, that the school predominantly spoke Norwegian, as that was the national language of the country the school was based, even though they perhaps only had two students *from* said country attending, it was respect to the land and a very minor magic in of itself. Never the less, she had requested that he show herself and her colleagues the appropriate respect by addressing them with the title *Laerer*, which meant Teacher. Even though he wasn't a student yet, they were still masters of their craft and educators who had worked long and hard to gain their positions. He guessed he now knew why Headmaster Dumbledore was constantly correcting him to call Snape 'Professor Snape'.

He had already made his decision to attend the school from what he'd read in the leaflets and the way *Laerer* Riveths handled the Dursleys, he was determined to, he liked the Deputy Headmistress and what he'd read of the school. He had always been more independent than other kids his age, and it was highlighted in the prospectus that students were assigned a Mentor, an older student, and would largely be left to their own devices and should there be any issues, their Mentor would bring it to the teacher's attention to

be handled. Plus, Laerer Riveths had mentioned that she could even arrange it so that he never had to return, or at least that was the gist he was getting from the conversation between the grown-ups earlier. What confused him though was Headmaster Dumbledore threatening Dudley, according to Aunt Petuna. Harry didn't think he would do that, so he assumed it was her overreacting, but... she wasn't one to make things up out of the blue, exaggerate and twist a tiny thing she'd heard, making mountains out of mole-hills, but rarely made anything up herself. She didn't approve of imagination. Had the Headmaster said something that she'd taken the wrong way? She did *that* quite often.

Aunt Petunia looked pinched and furious as she gingerly accepted the long red cord, wrapped in her finest winter coat, with a thick silky white cashmere sweater underneath, she had pulled a thick fluffy white hat on and her fine white leather gloves on. Vernon was straining at the zip of his american style sheep-wool lined bomber-jacket, wearing sturdy blue jeans and brown work boots that he sometimes pulled on when visiting various worksites to make sure his drills were doing their jobs right. All three of them were wearing a small strip of paper with red runes painted onto them pinned to their left breast, apparently these were the warming talismen.

"This is a Portkey, a method of magical transportation," Riveths explained as she shared part of the cord with Uncle Vernon, "It will feel somewhat unpleasant. We have made improvements on the enchantments compared to the old methods but there is still some residual discomfort. It will feel as if someone has grabbed you by the hip and suddenly pulled you to one side. I would advise tensing your neck and back muscles and closing your eyes, the spinning can be disorientating for first timers. Also, spread your legs and bend your knees as if jumping down from somewhere. This should help you avoid falling over when we land," the teacher explained, her voice adopting an almost lyrical lecturing tone as her features became significantly less animated, but much more relaxed.

Hesitantly the group did as they were told, Petunia having to adjust her grip at the Veela's suggestion before she laid a free hand on top of the cord, the

small silver ring and red gem on her middle finger lighting up as she said a word he didn't understand.

Suddenly it felt much like she described it would. Only harsher. Like someone had swung a rubber band against his hip, it picked him up forcefully and *hurled* him away, pushing him the whole distance before suddenly the ground slammed under his feet, making him stumble and his knees buckle a moment.

But he didn't fall. And the rubber band around his hip was gone.

Then the cold hit him, and he shuddered violently, pulling his cloak around him. Even with the little talisman the temperature was *bitter*. He peeked his eyes open and stared around him in confusion. Where was the school? They had appeared in a small sheltered alcove under an overhanging cliff, all around them was ice and snow, distantly to Harry's left he could see the ocean filled with ice drifting lazily in the strange grey-blue gloom.

A cold wet nose nudged his hand and Harry squawked in surprise, jerking around and coming eye to eye with a monstrously huge Husky. Vibrant blue eyes, black and white patterned thick fluffy fur, and enough muscle to make Fang look weedy, the animal gave him a doggy grin, tongue lolling to one side happily as it tilted his head at him. Harry smiled a little nervously, it was the size of a *horse!* He'd never seen a dog so big before.

"G-good dog?" he greeted nervously, edging backwards. The animal huffed in amusement before licking his face, tongue plastering flat to his chin and dragging upwards over his mouth, half his nose, and one of his eyes. Harry groaned in pre-teen disgust before he suddenly found himself being licked again and again in rapid fire, suddenly he was nudged over and fell in the snow, smothered in enthusiastic doggy affection – which involved a *lot* of licking, and cold noses in unwanted places. Distantly he could hear Riveths talking to the Dursleys as he tried to wrestle himself away from the massive dog who was determined to either drown him in saliva or lick his face off.

"At this time of year, we don't get much in the way of sunlight. Likely as not, we will see the sunrise for a few minutes at the horizon when we reach

the school before setting again," Laerer Riveths explained as she collected a fur lined coat from a very large sled that had four seats set one behind the other, and had about six other *massive* dogs reigned to it. The leader of whom was now currently assaulting their newest student prospective.

She smiled a little, "It seems as though Aragorn has taken a liking to you," she observed as Harry finally managed to shove the dog's face away.

He grimaced and wiped at his mouth and nose, "A-Aragorn?" he echoed doubtfully before the dog was suddenly pawing him over onto his stomach.

"He wants you to get up. Laying in the snow like that is bad for little humans. And yes, Laerer Matteson your Care of Magical Creatures teacher, is a very big fan of Mister Tolkien's works. Any animal in the school that she has bought or raised will have a Tolkien inspired name. Niflheim dogs are specifically bred and raised magically to be stronger, faster, more intelligent than their regular husky cousins, it is needed as the Wards around the Repository will not allow magical travel into the grounds. The rest of our journey must be taken via sled, and strong animals are needed. That Aragorn has taken such a liking towards you says well about your character," she praised as the animal bounded to her side and whined for attention. Smiling she bent down and started fussing him.

Harry climbed to his feet, his front caked in powdered snow that he tried to brush off without much effort, a little pink cheeked with embarrassment instead of cold.

Artemis straightened and flicked her hand at him, banishing the snow from his front and then gestured to the sled, "Everyone in. Mister Dursley at the back, Mrs Dursley in the middle, and Mister Potter in the front please, that way we shouldn't plough into any snow-drifts and become stuck," she explained as she ushered the three of them into position, Aragorn bounding to the front of the other dogs and ducking into his harness, and wiggling through the snow until he got his paws into the right position and then got up while leaning forward, the leather straps sliding neatly into place. The

dog behind him trotted forward and pulled on one strap which tightened the whole thing up and Aragorn shook himself before huffing happily.

"I-I don't think - " Petunia began nervously.

"Don't worry Pet, I was a champion dog-sledder in my day! You'll be fine!" Vernon boasted as he heaved himself into the back-seat of the sled, obviously very pleased that he would be closer to Laerer Riveths. Petunia's face pinched as she gave the beautiful woman a look of deepest loathing before following her husband, refusing to let him be alone with the harlot. Harry quickly scrambled into place in front of them, barely able to contain his excitement, he was still shivering a little from cold but it wasn't so bad.

At least he *was*, until Riveths suddenly dropped a huge furry blanket over him, and tucked him in tightly to the sled, "The trip will be just over an hour, and you're so small, it wouldn't do to have one of our prospective students freeze before he even arrives, or his family," she added, giving Petunia and Vernon similar fur blankets.

As soon as the woman was stood at the back of the sled, she gave the reigns a little flick and called out a word, it definitely wasn't '*Mush*', Harry couldn't begin to pronounce it so he assumed it must have been Norwegian. But either way the dogs suddenly threw their weight forward, heads down, shoulders forward and *straining*.

Slowly the sled began to slide forward on the snow, and the dogs took one laborious step forward, two, three, "*You can do it*," Harry whispered encouragingly, as the animals panted and grunted as slowly they slid faster, and the dogs moved into a slow trot that gradually became a run.

Harry whooped as the animals finally started running, harnesses jingling as the sled got up to speed. Aragorn barked back at him happily, several of the other dogs joining him happily as they surged on through the snow back home.

He couldn't wait.

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Okay, I wanted to put the school in this chapter, but Artemis is very thorough, she notices a lot. So I wanted to cover her a bit more in depth. Then puppies happened and before I knew it the page count was at five (my typical Chapter length) and I figured here was a good place to stop. I try not to make my chapters too long because then they're a bit of a labour to chew through, and sometimes people don't have a lot of time. So, a nice medium length chapter, something to get your teeth into, but won't take half an hour to read. XDDD

4. Chapter 4

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

I do not own Harry Potter, Abhorsen, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, or Monster Hunter. I'm just playing with them.

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CHAPTER FOUR

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His cheeks were numb and stinging, whipped raw by the wind as they surged across the frozen snow. Harry was *freezing*, bundling himself up in the wolf-fur blanket he had been given he still found himself shivering as they ploughed onwards. The horizon steadily lightening up from a forbidding dark grey to a lighter, almost green tinged one.

Then they saw it, in the distance, a jagged gleaming oddity upon the icy blue glacier ahead. White towers capped in blue, trimmed with green and

blazing windows that glowed in the frozen predawn gloom of the snowy waste around them.

"HOLD TIGHT WHILE I RAISE THE BRIDGE!" Laerer Riveths called over the wind, dragging Harry's attention away from the barely visible protrusion at the top of the glacier. In front of them was a huge broken expanse of water filled with icebergs.

Aunt Petunia screamed as they rushed onwards with pause or hesitation straight towards the water. Harry felt her scrambling behind him, one hand clawing at his shoulder as he sank into the sled with rising trepidation. Miss Riveths had said something about a bridge – *where was it*!?

The water parted, a huge bulb of ice slicing upwards through the water and then unfurling open like flower petals from a bud to lay flat, forming an open path across the water to the next iceberg. Harry's breath caught in his throat as the dogs galloped fearlessly across it without slipping even the slightest of inches. There was no icy spray of water, just a definite chill and the taste of brine in the air as they shot across the ice flower over what Harry identified as probably part of an ocean.

From iceberg to iceberg, more flowers slit the water and laid flat for them, unerringly taking them closer and closer to the glacier that now stood out stark white against the dark grey sky and foreboding clouds blotting the sunrise. He could see signal lights blazing in some of the towers, and what looked like monstrously huge birds wheeling through the air around it. They veered to the right where a slope rose out of the water, taking them to the top of the glacier. The dogs threw their backs into the run and powered up the icy incline with grunting howls and harsh panting breaths. They were still some miles away from the school proper, but Harry could make out some better details now. There seemed to be three floors to the building itself, towers in each corner at the back of the structure facing out over the edge of the glacier, one atop the gates with a signal fire that mirrored the two towers. The huge birds were in fact planes and other flying things, he could see a few brooms up there, a flying carpet, someone with wings,

another riding a winged horse, and a massive owl without a rider in formation with the planes.

The dogs barked happily, running even faster now that they were on the home stretch. The huge gates swung open into the courtyard and the dogs began to slow as they slid into the school.

Harry wished he had about eight more eyes. He was right in thinking there were only three floors, the windows on the ground floor were all frosted so he couldn't see through them, the building itself was white trimmed in shades of green with rich blue roofing. The courtyard was regular grey flagstones swept free of snow but had raised wooden flower beds enchanted to keep warm, rosebushes, trees, orchids, daisies, poppies, even sunflowers and lily of the valley were in full bloom despite the time of year. Unknown trees stretching up as high as the third floor their lower branches strung with paper lanterns and other decorations, and just behind them, up against the walls were various benches, occupied by students in red and black, staring at them as the dogs came to a stop, panting happily.

Slowly climbing off the sled, Harry kept the blanket wrapped around him as he stared up and around in wonder, was the front door framed in *gold*? He goggled a little in shock but ultimately kind of shrugged in semi-hysterical acceptance. When you had the man who invented the Philosopher's Stone on staff, he guessed gold and precious metals took on a different value when your supply was unlimited. Miss Riveths climbed off the sled and came to the front of their group, Harry turning in slow circles while his aunt and uncle practically cowered under their own blankets. She gave the twelve year old a small smile when he turned to her, unable to feel the huge awed grin splitting his numb wind chapped face.

"Welcome to Niflheim," she told him.

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The front door was indeed framed in gold and emerald. As they stepped into the entrance hall, Vernon made a sound like a dying mouse as he stared around at the very obvious opulence. White stone floors with a trim of

emerald bricks bordering the whole room, the corners decorated with gold. The open doorway to the Great Hall framed in *diamond* bricks larger than his fist showing a room with an emerald floor, huge stained glass windows overlooking the ocean horizon and lazily drifting iceburgs. The entrance hall itself was fairly open with no second or third floor to them, in fact, there were balconies from the third-floor overlooking the entrance hall, craning his neck, Harry could see students milling around, laughing, there seemed to be some kind of student cafe in the right wing balcony, while the left wing balcony was running some manner of stationary shop. The ground floor was primarily the dormitories and social areas, a short staircase spanning the entire length of the room from the entrance hall led down into those areas; each room was warded so it didn't matter what gender the occupants were, boys and girls shared hallways easily with only separate bathhalls and toilets, boys having their bathhall in the right wing, girls in the left, with toilets for both genders in both wings. In the entrance hall to the right of the Great Hall's doorway was a large flight of stairs leading down to several classrooms, the Repository, and the Flight Deck; to the right of that was the headmistress's office beside it at the small set of stairs leading down to the right wing dormitories. To the left of the Great Hall was another large flight of stairs leading down to the lower levels and a short set of stairs to the left wing dormitories beside that; at the bottom of those stairs was the nurse's office. This was to be Harry's first port of call in their tour of the facilities.

"Due to the fact we do not accept students until they have reached a certain level of magical strength, you are in actual fact, our youngest human student to date. We merely wish to ensure that the accelerated learning programme will not cause your development any problems," Riveths explained smoothly as she escorted them down the stairs, Uncle Vernon purple and tongue-tied as he stared at the *metre by metre* bricks of emerald that made up the support pillars to the third floor balcony.

The door had a small frosted window and when it opened Harry could smell oranges and mint. Much like the rest of the school that Harry had seen it was done in shades of green and white, multiple neat white and yellow beds and bedside tables lined the wall on his right as they moved further into the

room. There were two students present, one fast asleep on a bed close to the fireplace with a girl sat next to them reading a book and looking annoyed, she barely glanced up at them before Miss Riveths gestured at her and the girl went straight back to ignoring them. Against the far wall were a set of huge windows showing the ice filled ocean and growing snowstorm whirling outside, to the far right was a fireplace that was big enough for someone to stand up in with room to spare that spanned nearly the whole wall. Probably a Floo connection, Harry decided. Framing the window were bookshelves and opposite them was a small office that Riveths knocked on politely.

An elderly woman that Harry recognised from his prospectus as the strange Alice Hyuga who had the absurdly young husband answered it. She wasn't much different from her picture, her face was lined and aged, but still held a hint of that classical beauty that she must have been as a young woman, her snow white hair was pulled back into a bun with a pale blue ribbon, she wore a neat long pale blue dress with a white collar, and a white shawl draped across her shoulders, around her neck was a bronze crucifix. Harry shifted nervously as her clear sapphire blue eyes flickered over them before resting on him.

She smiled warmly, "A new student?" she asked stepping forward with a book tucked under her arm.

"Indeed. Mister Potter, allow me to introduce Healer Alice Hyuga, one of the greatest Light Sorceresses in the world. Her husband Yuri Hyuga teaches Physical Defence," Laerer Riveths explained with a polite nod to the old woman, "Alice, this is Harry Potter, a prospective student from England. Our youngest yet. Could you give him a check up? I have some concerns," the Greek/Finn Veela explained with a significant look at the other woman.

The old woman nodded easily, "Of course. Hop on the nearest bed please, it shouldn't take too long," she said gesturing him to the row of beds behind him. Nervously, Harry hopped up onto one and wedged his hands between his knees to stop himself from fidgeting. The old woman laid her book out

in front of her, it was thin and... Harry frowned, it LOOKED like it was made of roughly stitched together leather. "Ouranos, Ouranos, Ouranos," the old woman intoned softly lifting her hands away from the book, leaving it floating in place without support.

White light gathered in her hands and suddenly ribbons of purple and orange unravelled from him to wrap around her instead.

She lowered her hands slowly, staring at him for a long moment, her expression inscrutable, before she smiled a little lopsidedly. "One moment please," she requested before moving back into her office, leaving her book levitating in mid-air.

A moment later she returned with a small white stone. "Hold onto this for a second while I cast the scanning spell again," she told him before using that odd incantation once again. Harry glanced down at the warm stone in his hand, it was a dirty off yellow nub of, well, he thought it was sandstone, but it wasn't quite. It had a strange feeling to it, despite being oddly warm in his hand.

Alice hummed as she collected her book, turning to Miss Riveths, "His health isn't as good as I would like," she admitted slowly, blue eyes canting to his relatives for a heartbeat before snapping back to the deputy headmistress. "He is severely underweight for his age and shows signs of delayed development due to long term malnutrition, likely as not he will not begin puberty until his mid-teens and will remain stunted in terms of height and weight. He will need some dentistry aid as his teeth are... not as good as they could be. Magically speaking though, an accelerated learning plan would be essential as the poor boy's magic is showing signs of stagnating already," the old woman explained making Aunt Petunia splutter in indignation. Vernon however nodded importantly.

"Gotta raise these freaks with a firm hand," he bragged importantly, his wife going grey in horror as he blurted out their best kept secret to the very people that *could never know it it!* "Gave the little freeloader exactly what he deserved, a good wallop to keep him in line, and scraps from the bin to

keep him working," he boasted, unaware of how both women stared at him, Miss Riveths in increasingly dark rage, and Mrs Hyuga with her hand over her mouth in horror.

"Vernon!" Aunt Petunia moaned fearfully, grabbing at his arm.

"I see," Miss Riveths choked out, her eyes narrow. "Alice, would you please keep an eye on Mister Potter while I escort our guests to the Headmistress? I'm sure they will be very interested in what she has to offer them," the blonde woman ground out through her perfect pearly white teeth.

Alice nodded firmly, "Of course. I'll call up for some brunch, how does that sound, Harry?" she asked, smiling at the twelve year old as her colleague nodded and sharply gestured at the Dursleys to follow her.

"I – I uh," he spluttered uncertainly, wanting to interject but what could he say when his Uncle had just outed the whole sorry thing to them himself? When the Healing spells showed them? "I don't want to inconvenience anyone," he managed to get out, glancing nervously after his Aunt and Uncle. Not particularly out of any concern for them, though he did give a passing thought to wonder what would befall them now, but not wanting to be left alone with a woman he still wasn't 100% sure wasn't a pervert after young men.

"No inconvenience. I insist," she assured him before gesturing him to her office. Reluctantly, he followed, gripping the little stone tightly in his hand and mentally vowing to run the second she so much as looked at him funny as he glanced back at the other students, the girl staring at him in pity. He flushed when he realised that she'd heard the whole thing and ducked his head, feeling his ears burn in embarrassment and shame. Thankfully the old woman left the door open and kept up a cheery stream of aimless chatter as she filled a teapot and rummaged a few bits to eat out of tins amongst the utter mess of her office.

Harry could only stare in astonishment at the huge array of quite frankly *random* objects on her shelves and tables. Some of which were quite pretty, others quite frightening. She had an old book *covered* in lurid red

bloodstains sat next to an old slightly moth-eaten teddy bear wearing a bronze pocket watch, perched beside it was a doll made of twigs and twine, it smiled at the old woman as she passed, not maliciously, but a genuine happy smile that actually looked kind of cute, if horrifying because it was coming from what Harry tentatively identified as a *voodoo doll*. Slips of neatly stacked paper talismen covered in Chinese characters and delicate paintings of birds in cedar wood boxes, what looked like a very crude lottery ticket pinned to a shelf next to a collection of cards, a serpent, a moon, and a star. And shockingly of all, a beautiful white winged crucifix inlaid with unknown blue jewels, about the size of his palm – he hadn't thought magic users were into Christianity, or religion at all in general.

Alice smiled when she saw where he was looking, "My old equipment," she admitted fondly, "Back in my younger years I was quite the exorcist for hire. I travelled through Asia and Europe helping people with all manner of problems. It's how I met my husband, I got myself into a spot of trouble with the Japanese army and he rescued me. We ended up stopping some rather nasty warlocks from summoning powers they ought not to have." She sighed wistfully as she picked up the crucifix, "I almost miss those days of endless travel, even the uncomfortable train carriages and coaches. We were so sure back then, so pure..." she trailed off lovingly.

Harry swallowed, "So, you met your husband when you were young?" he asked curiously. Looked like he was right to think the 'young' man wasn't human.

She laughed, "Oh yes. I think I had just turned twenty some two months before hand, Yuri was... Oh goodness I couldn't begin to remember, somewhere between twenty one and twenty three I think. He hasn't changed much over the years while I've aged and now look like old leather," she laughed as she hugged the crucifix to her chest tightly.

"Cutest leather I ever saw," a male voice interrupted. Harry jolted and whirled around as Alice laughingly cried a pleased "Yuri!". It was her husband. Still impossibly young seeming for someone so old, he was wild, there was no other word for it. Messy brown hair that was just as untamable

as Harry's own, a face like a blade, cocky smirk and challengingly inhuman amber-red eyes, powerfully muscled but wiry, he wore loose casual clothes, a plain pair of black jeans and army boots, and a red T-shirt. He wouldn't have looked out of place in the muggle world if not for those eyes and the aura of barely restrained violence. But the way he looked at Alice... Warm and soft, as if she hung the moon and stars for him and made the world worth living. Harry blushed a little, feeling like a voyeur just being there.

"Who's the munchkin?" he asked playfully, winking down at the twelve year old. Harry grinned, ducking his head shyly and decided that he liked this man already.

"Harry Potter, one of our new prospective students," Alice answered, smiling sweetly as the wild man kissed her cheek and casually looped his arms around her in a tight hug before turning so she could lean back against his chest.

"No kidding?" the amber eyed man asked, eyeing him speculatively before grinning, "You'll have to come by during our Upper Year lesson, give you an idea of what the future holds if you stick around."

"We were just talking about our old adventures, Harry was quite interested in my equipment," Alice explained, holding up her crucifix. Yuri rested his chin on top of her head with a nostalgic smile on his face.

"Good times. Christ they were insane though. Hey kid, did you ever learn what fucked up Shanghai back in 1915?"

Harry cast his mind back but he couldn't remember anything, slowly he shook his head and guessed, "An earthquake?" he queried.

Yuri scoffed, "Naw, us. Some shit for brains - "

"Yuri!" Alice scolded, nudging him.

"Sorry, some idiot decided that since Japan were invading an' everything they needed to make a clear line in the sand. So he decided to summon an

Earth Deity to erase Japan off the map."

Harry gaped, "How is that a *line in the sand*?" he squawked.

Yuri grinned wildly, "Supposedly he wanted to make it a warning to the West, going 'we're powerful enough to erase countries leave us alone already we've had enough'. Didn't quite work out though. He died during the attempt, it takes a stupidly HUGE amount of power to activate a Mandela of Hell, especially one that's been inverted. Not to mention he needed to seal away the four gods of direction and desecrate the Nine Heavens' Taoist Magics to even get it started. But yeah, idiot died, and his not so little god-monster went feral. Set Shanghai on fire."

"Yuri tried to stop it," Alice mused quietly, her eyes far away as she stroked her husband's wrist with a withered hand, "He managed to take it away into Europe and seal it, but it drove him mad in the process. I spent... months looking for him. It was pure luck, *pure luck*, that Master Zhuzhen and I found him again. I was able to bring his mind back, but it was a steep price to pay," she lamented before smiling as she leaned her head back against him, "Worth it though. And one I would pay again quite gladly."

Yuri's wild grin turned soppy as he looked down at her, dropping a kiss into the crown of her forehead.

From there, they spent what felt like just over an hour and a half going through Mrs Hyuga's collection of items, the two eagerly telling him what was what, how they were made, even pointing out the ones he himself would learn to make, though some of them couldn't be remade. Such as the small teddybear on Alice's shelf, she called it Leonardo's Bear, supposedly it had been left behind in a cabin of a ghost ship, because of the spiritual energies it had been absorbing in the years before its discovery, she claimed it made death curses in-effectual. Harry wondered if he had ever possessed something similar as a child to deflect the Killing Curse. The beautiful winged crucifix was one that he would learn to recreate, apparently it was a replica itself of a crucifix found on the chest of a giant god statue excavated from the ruins of Zafral. She even showed him dried herbs, seeds, and roots

of various plants that had special powers that had fallen out of common knowledge amongst magic users simply because they were *too* simple. People had gotten into the mind-set that magic and magical herbs had to be complex and difficult to grow and handle.

"While it is true that some plants are difficult to grow, such as Mana Leaf, and what many mistake as a simple hallucinogen such as Pure Leaf, you'll be learning how to distil and extract their magical essences in Alchemy lessons, something only for those students who excel in their Potions' class," Alice explained as she showed off a blue bottle that smelt sweet and glowed through the container.

Yuri laughed, "And with the resources and students here, that wrinkled old bean gets the best of the best!" he explained referring to the Potion's professor, Roger Bacon, or Nicholas Flamel, which ever he was referring to himself as.

Harry smiled awkwardly, "Guess that rules me out then," he mused.

"Maybe, maybe not," Yuri hedged with a grin, "You're the youngest go-getter we've seen so far, you've got time."

Alice smiled at him as she gave him a small green fan-shaped leaf, it looked like a miniature palm tree frond that was barely the size of his palm, and he had fairly small hands by comparison. "The problem I've found with this school... is that the facilities are amazing, the students are powerful, the teachers are gifted. You have all the resources open to you, and that creates an expectation that can crush a person," she explained sadly as she gestured at him to eat it. "I often see students on the verge of complete melt-downs and burn outs from over work and over stress. The reason Artemis brought you in to see me was to assess whether or not the stress of the high pressure learning environment would cause you any health issues beyond the norm."

Harry chewed the leaf nervously, but felt himself become calmer as he did so, not quite at peace, but almost as if he felt a little braver, a bit more confident in himself. "And... would it?" he asked hesitantly, recalling that

she mentioned something about his magic showing signs of being stagnant. And something about acceleration.

"It would actually be good for you," she admitted as she rummaged a small wooden token from her desk and handed it over. "You have much the same problem with your magic as I did when I was young, it is *vast* and powerful, and it threatens to overflows from you like water from a cup." Harry swore in surprise when the token she handed him burst into life, growing branches and vines until he dropped it on the floor where it writhed for a moment and burst into flower. Huge white five petal lilies splitting open glaring a blinding white up at them. Alice nodded as if expecting it while Yuri looked surprised and whistled in a mix of amusement and awe, "The excessive magical drain the courses would provide would give you the magical work out you need. If you had continued with such minor acts of magic and long periods of disuse, you would have stunted your magical potential by at least half," the woman explained even further as she bent down and picked up the token. She tucked it into a plant pot and handed it over to him with a smile. "However, I can't say anything about how your mental health would handle such high expectations, I am sorry."

Yuri chuckled, "He can handle it," the man declared assuredly, Harry looked over at him, a little shocked that he would be so certain after having only known him for such a short amount of time. The older man grinned, "I can tell. You'll survive, you've got that look in your eye. Seen it before."

"I'm not so good at academic stuff," he admitted nervously.

Alice laughed, "Neither is Yuri," she confided.

"Still saved the world and got the girl," the amber eyed man boasted proudly.

"No one is good at academics when they first begin to learn, Mister Potter," an unknown voice interrupted, making the twelve year old jump and whip around. A new woman was stood in the door way to Mrs Hyuga's office, one that Harry hesitantly identified from his prospectus as the Headmistress, Catherine Winter. "That is the whole point of a school, to

teach." She smiled then, a small, sly little thing that changed her face from predatory to mischevious, "I imagine you'll have a fair bit to teach us yourself in the time you're here if what my Hogwarts contemporaries tell me of your adventures is true," she added.

Harry blushed furiously.

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And that's a wrap. Okay, usually I hate answering reviews IN the fic, but some folk just don't sign in and I think a lot of people are probably sharing these questions and since they decided not to check my facebook page (link in my profile), they won't have the answers or be able to ask them directly.

Regarding Age Rating: I'm well aware of the age rating rules Guest Reviewer, it's fine. If it reaches a point where I need to up the rating to something more appropriate, I will. But for now T-for teen is fine. At the moment, the worst we will see is bad language, allusions to past child abuse, and maybe a few fight scenes. At best. And please bare in mind, Niflheim isn't going to be like Miranda Flairgold's Akren, so it isn't going to be super-violent student vs student internal civil war.

Regarding Pairings and Sex: Harry is twelve at present. He has no pairing at present. Please do not ever accuse me of writing pedo porn again. In fact, I'm going out on a limb here and guessing you've never read ANY of my fics before and take this moment to reassure you and any other wary new reader: **I do not write sex scenes.** The only fic I have with such scenes is a facebook exclusive writing experiment where I tried to broaden my horizons and promptly realised that the only way I was ever going to manage that scene was if I had a bottle of rum close at hand. Sufficed to say, there will be zero sex scenes in Niflheim. There will be mentions of other characters in sexual relationships, but nothing explicit.

Regarding Slash and my Readership: I am primarily a Slash writer. So I really don't give a damn if people don't like it to be perfectly honest because it is entirely non-graphic, relationship focused, and most of my regular

readers are cool with it, ergo, people whom I communicate with often via facebook and reviews, people whose opinions actually do matter to me. I also notice you seem to give no comment about the foreshadowed and warned of lesbian relationships... Hm.

Regarding the Crossover aspect: What crossover section would you recommend I put this fic into, since there are minor crossovers with seven other works of fiction/games? Apologies but no. These are minor crossovers and fusions in that I am borrowing concepts, characters, and magic systems from all of these works and weaving them into this fic, there's too much to shunt into any one crossover category and thus, like most writers, I am shoehorning it into the main one.

Regarding Harry Potter characters and my OCs: Harry has been expelled from Hogwarts yes, but that doesn't mean he a/ won't ever go back, or b/ have no contact with anyone from Hogwarts. He still has Hedwig, Ron isn't an asshole, and Voldemort isn't just going to ignore him because he's out of the country. As for my OCs, Niflheim is my branching out, so to speak. I feel I've reached a point in my readership to attempt showing off my own original characters in a world-setting that I've created and seeing how they respond to it, what they think of those people and places as I do wish to eventually begin writing my own original work. I'm just slowly introducing more of my own personal brand of fiction into already established works to see how people respond. I would like honest opinions on these characters from reviewers as well please.

TL;DR summary: *Age rating will go up if it needs to – not before, I don't do sex scenes, Harry has no pairing at present because twelve, I write slash – get over it, there will be lesbians in future – I see you have no problem with this, I'm keeping this fic exactly where it is because there's too much shit crammed into it to put it into one crossover category over another, Hogwarts will still be a thing in future, I want to know what people think of my original characters and world building because I plan to actually get published somewhere in future so feedback would be appreciated.*

Whew. So yeah, reviews very very very welcome.

5. Chapter 5

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

I do not own Harry Potter, Abhorsen, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, or Monster Hunter. I'm just playing with them.

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CHAPTER FIVE

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The Dursleys had signed over their guardianship rights to Headmistress Winter.

And Harry wasn't quite sure how to feel about that.

Alice brewed up some tea for him, adding a few of the strange herbs she had growing in her office and even casting a spell over the pot as it simmered before pouring him a cup as he numbly sat on the cushy blue

armchair she had within her office. Yuri seemed to be discussing something with the Headmistress in a low, almost aggressive tone, but she seemed unmoved by whatever he was saying, listening to him stoically while keeping half an eye on him as he wrapped his hands around the small cup and tried to sort himself out.

From the start, apparently, Miss Riveths had been intending on speaking to the Dursleys about signing over their rights to the Headmistress. So as to better protect him from the British Ministry of Magic who... were perhaps more easily led astray than other governing bodies, she explained. But when Miss Riveths arrived, her empathy had detected the whole emotional mess of the occupants and became concerned over his welfare. The health-checks for students during the Open Day was apparently a minor lie she told in order to allow the Dursleys to bring him into the Infirmary.

"Though it is a good idea, and I should like to see it implemented further," Alice piped up as she ensured Harry received a second mug of the oddly spicy tea that was helping him sort through and understand what was happening. Some kind of alien calm had come over him, like that Pure Leaf he had eaten earlier, but stronger.

"I shall think about it," the Headmistress promised with an inclination of her head.

As of right now, the Headmistress was his legal guardian. This woman he had never met, who had, never the less, rescued him from the Dursleys.

He was, all at once, both thankful and suspicious.

Not even Dumbledore had removed him from his relatives, stating that the blood protections of his mother would keep him far safer than anything else. What did this woman not only remove him, but also take custody of him for herself? To strong arm him into attending her school? For whatever money he inherited from his parents? He shook himself, he was being stupid. She had a school that used metre by metre *bricks* of emerald as support columns for the third floor. Money was not an issue for her. Which left his guardianship – and as much as Harry felt that he himself was

nothing special, he wasn't so ignorant to think that The Boy Who Lived was equally as mundane.

The Headmistress chuckled wryly, "You betray your thoughts, Mister Potter," she informed him as she leaned back against the table behind her, legs crossed, arms folded. For some reason, Harry thought she was missing something. A weapon of some description would fit her better, he realised. A sword, or a bow, maybe an axe. Just... something was missing, and he couldn't pin-point what. "Very good," she suddenly praised with a smirk, she looked over to Alice, "He has your substance, my dear. Whether he chooses to learn with us or elsewhere, I would request you keep an eye on him," she told the older woman.

"What?" Harry asked, bewildered as Alice frowned at the grey eyed woman.

"I would have done so without asking, Catherine, but ultimately it is Harry's decision whether or not he keeps contact with us," she scolded.

The Headmistress frowned back at her, "And risk a second Shanghai, or Neam?" she fired back softly. Alice grimaced and looked away. Harry was getting *really* confused, and fairly certain that he did not like the Headmistress all that much. She looked at him, "My apologies, Mister Potter. That is something of an inside story that has little to do with me, and everything to do with the Light Lady. However, you two possess very unique and exceptionally similar magical gifts, gifts that others would seek to abuse if they could. Were it not for Mister Hyuga's timely intervention, history would be far different from what it is today, and Madam Alice would not have lived long enough to reach her full magical potential. A fate, I fear, may befall you if left unattended," she warned severely as Yuri moved to his wife and gathered her up in his arms once more, "I would request they take you in themselves, become your lawful guardians, but you are not a tool to be passed around. And while I am sure they would welcome you with open arms," she flashed the couple a knowing smile that was not returned before looking back down at him, "it is ultimately *your*

choice, and yours alone. I believe your experiences have lent you maturity enough to decide your own fate."

Harry nodded slowly, drawing his knees up to his chest as he huddled back in his armchair, teacup slowly cooling in a tight grasp just under his chin. He still didn't quite have a clear idea of what was going on, but they were giving him the option to choose what happened to him now, he guessed, which he really did appreciate. But he wanted to know what was going on more than anything. "What's going to happen to the Dursleys?" he finally asked, that was what nagged at him insistently right now. As unwilling and bitter as they had been, they had still taken him in, raised him, protected him, and he would go so far as to even say that their '*toughening up*' treatment had been better for him than their coddling of Dudley. He could ask about this unique magical gift later, preferably from Alice herself who apparently shared it.

The Headmistress inclined her head, eyes flickering shut for a breath before she looked back up, staring him in the eye, "You expressed a desire to Laerer Riveths to see them come to no harm, so no harm will befall them. Magical laws in your country of birth are different to others, child protection laws seem to be non-existent, if only because those Pureblood families have a loose definition of what constitutes as abuse when it comes to prompting accidental magic from their children. Should the child be found without, as Squibs are legally classed as secondary citizens, it is not abuse, nor is it murder if they are killed for their lack of active magic. With Niflheim being an independent, we cannot try nor punish your family for their deplorable behaviour, as much as we may wish to."

"Your relatives are currently on a sled heading out of the wards where they will be Portkey'd back to England and their residence. They have neither been enchanted, nor threatened, nor harmed. I have sent Laerer Baquir, our Wards teacher, with them to see to the tangled mess of protections on the house. He will remove them, and allow your relatives to live the magic-free life they desire. I have also sent one of our elves to collect your belongings to be delivered to my office. You need not return to that residence unless

you wish to," the Headmistress told him gently as she drummed her fingers on her forearm.

Harry shifted nervously, "Can't you keep the wards up if they're protecting them? I mean, I don't like them but I don't want them to get hurt," he admitted anxiously.

"The wards in their present state wouldn't have been able to prevent a particularly motivated sixteen year old, I'm sorry to say, Mister Potter," she told him flatly, "The wards are intent based, and poorly raised. They have prevented a fair bit of damage to the home, but in no way would they have been able to prevent a magic user from gaining access. Misdirection, subterfuge, a veil of '*don't look, there's nothing unusual here, nothing different*'. That every house in that particular suburb is near enough identical only adds to the illusion over the property. An illusion that becomes useless the moment someone actually *knows* you live there."

"B-But Professor Dumbledore said – he said that they would protect me, that's why I had to stay there!" Harry objected, why would he lie?

The Headmistress shrugged, "Albus Dumbledore is a Transfiguration Master, but no Ward Master. And he is not omnipotent. He laid the wards as he should have done, but they did not anchor or unfold correctly due to Mrs Dursley's reluctance and bitterness regarding her sister. Coupled with the various obscuring charms upon the property, I believe he simply did not *know* how ineffective those protections were. In his efforts to hide a magical home amidst a mundane haystack, he has somewhat shot himself in the foot with his own cleverness. As for removing the wards, it was Mrs Dursley's wish," she explained flatly.

That... was probably more than likely. Harry drained his cup and wrapped his arms around his knees, letting the still warm china sit between his legs against his chest as he tried to think this through as calmly as he could. Flying off the handle wasn't going to help him here, twelve year old Gryffindor or not, the Hat *had* considered him for Slytherin, and it hadn't been for his ambition. One had to have more than a little cunning to live

under the Dursleys' roof as a magical child, not to mention the self-preservation to know when you could get away with cheek, and when to keep your mouth shut and your head down. It was nice that they were giving him a choice, however suspicious it was that they seemed to believe a *twelve year old* was capable of making them. No doubt there *would* be limits on just how much freedom they planned to give him, but within those limits he at least had the illusion of freedom. It chafed a little, but he could live with that. He was indeed *only* twelve. No where near mentally or emotionally or even physically mature enough to take care of himself just yet, well, he *could*, just not as well as he perhaps *should*.

So.

The Dursleys had signed over their rights to him. Alright, that meant he never had to live under their roof ever again. Excellent. The wards were being dismantled right now so that meant there was no *need* for him to live with them ever again. So even if Dumbledore or the Ministry decided he should, there was no reason so they wouldn't, right?

Headmistress Winter now had custody of him. She *wanted* the Hyugas' to take custody of him, but ultimately it was *Harry's* choice as to where he ended up.

He liked the Hyugas', but he didn't really know them... And from what he read, it seemed like Headmistress Winter did this whole 'take Guardianship' thing fairly often. So likely as not, he wasn't the only child she'd taken in from abusive families.

"What... What's your place like, I mean, for the other kids like me? What's going to happen there?" he asked, figuring he had best get a good read on what to expect from this woman before saying anything to the Hyugas' about whether or not he was going to stay with them.

The Headmistress smirked a little at him, "I am rather hands off, Mister Potter. Typically our students come to us at their mid-teens, when they reach the required magical levels. I feel that is old enough to be responsible for their own well-being. I run a collection of Youth Hostels throughout

Europe, some magical, others muggle. You would be staying in the Hostel for the school in Amsterdam, where the ship bound for the school will be leaving. Meals and rooms are provided, bathing facilities, clothes washing, study facilities, there is a Hostel manager who will keep an eye on things, but when I say I am hands off, I do mean it. Unless someone comes to me with a problem, and they may come to me regarding *any* problem, be it nightmares, bullying, depression, or mere homesickness, I will do my best to help. But I do not poke my nose in where it is not invited. In return for that trust, I expect you to behave yourself and abide by the Hostel rules, the manager will inform you of them when you arrive," she explained with a faint proud smile.

Harry nodded slowly, "And what does that mean if the Ministry- I mean, the British Ministry of Magic try to arrest me or something?" he asked warily. They expelled him for being a Parselmouth, who knew what they'd get it into their heads to do next if he happened to be a convenient scapegoat once again.

"It means that you fall under the Netherlands Ministry of Magic, in a very loose kind of manner. I am as close to a neutral, sovereign body in of itself, by becoming one of my wards, you technically do not fall under *any* Ministry of Magic, aside from the country in which you are currently living in. As the Hostel for Niflheim is based within the Netherlands, you would fall under their Ministry regarding basic legal matters," Headmistress Winter explained with a thoughtful frown, "But the legislation is... old, and full of loopholes. There could very well be some manner long forgotten bill that would give your country of origin some power over you, however small it may be. Magic is complex, the older it is, the more powerful and complicated it may be. And England has a surprisingly rich magical history for all of its current stagnation. More than this, I cannot say."

He nodded once again, that was... she was being very honest, and he did appreciate it. Though he was somewhat wary about just *why* she was being so honest as well.

She snorted, "Lying to you, Mister Potter, is perhaps one of the stupidest things I could possibly do right now. If Madam McGonagall hasn't been lying to me regarding your prior adventures, then it would not surprise me in the slightest that you would eventually find out if I had been untruthful to you," she stated blandly. He stared at her and she smirked even further, "Yes I can read your mind. You rather have a habit of shouting your thoughts out and as fascinating as they are, they are rather hard to ignore when broadcasted at that particular volume."

He blushed horribly, "I-I'm sorry."

She waved it off, "If you choose to learn here, one of the first courses offered to you will be the Mind Arts. All students will be expected to learn how to shield themselves at the very least. Think nothing of it, Mister Potter, that you think things through so thoroughly and logically is a credit to you," she praised as she accepted a cup of tea from Mrs Hyuga.

"It's because of Miss Alice's tea, she put Pure Leaf in there," he explained awkwardly.

Alice beamed at him, "Pure Leaf only keeps you calm, Harry. Everything else is your own reasoning and intelligence. You're a very bright young man," she complimented him sincerely as she leaned back against her husband.

Harry nodded slowly, "And... if I *didn't* attend Niflheim... what then?" he asked warily, eyeing Headmistress Winter carefully to gage her reaction.

She didn't even bat an eyelid, "Then we would look for a school to meet with your approval, move you to the nearest Hostel for it, and register you to attend for when it started."

Huh...

She smiled kindly, "Would you like to continue with your tour of our facilities before you make your mind up?" she asked gently as she pushed herself to her feet.

"Oh, y-yeah! Please, I mean," he floundered a little, he quickly scrambled to his feet as the Headmistress smiled and bade the married couple goodbye until dinner, he flustered a little with his cup, sheepishly leaving it on the nearest shelf and hurrying after her, Yuri's laughter chasing his heels along with Alice's giggling. The two left the infirmary, climbing the stairs back into the main entrance hall.

"First things first," the Headmistress began, "Let's show you the Great Hall," she declared, taking him up the few steps through the diamond archway. Harry stared at the huge bricks, wondering if they had been cut or pressurized into such shapes.

"Ma'am, why -"

"So many precious stones and metals? They help to power and focus the wards. Diamond is an amazing focus stone, while emerald is a powerful storage gem. Gold doesn't channel magic at all so it aids in directing magic when placed strategically, while quartz is a breath-taking amplifier when found in the right quality and quantity," she explained as they stepped inside. It was a huge grand room, wider than Hogwarts' Great Hall, with an emerald floor and white walls, the staff stable was made of a red coloured wood with a strip of unknown shiny black material running through the centre, and stretched horizontally across the Hall at the back, with two huge arched windows framing a sunken in area with another, third, window in red and black stained glass. Two long tables made of a similar red wood, with red chairs with black padded seats and high-backs tucked neatly under the edges flanked the centre of the room, stretching from the door to the staff table, and two smaller tables running parallel to them on either side. There were a handful of students in the room, all of the tables had basic snack-foods in baskets in the centre along with pitchers of water and honey coloured liquid, some of them were nibbling on rolls of bread smothered in honey and butter, another was surrounded by a small fort of collective books and a pile of loose papers as high as his wrist to his elbow. A few of them glanced over, one lifted their honey covered bun in greeting, and the one with all the books cursed at the Headmistress before returning to his work. She only chuckled in response.

"As you can see, there is food available at all hours. The Great Hall is open to all students day and night for both study and food. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are all served here as a buffet, the small table over here will be laid out with various foods for you to choose between. Meals are *not* mandatory, but attendance during important feasts and events are. Keep an eye on the student notice boards for when they occur," she explained before flashing him a smile, "Unlike Hogwarts, you may sit where you wish. Though I would recommend this area here, there's a fireplace on the otherside of the wall, so it is warmer," she added with a small wink.

From the Great Hall, she showed him down the right wing dormitories, letting him have a peek into one of the empty rooms. She took him through a small commons type area, with a large marble fireplace framed in plush purple sofas and arm-chairs, bookcases and desks occupying the walls and corners, up the stairs and through various classrooms and study halls. He got to sit in on a Music lesson for a little bit, and one of the students, a young man with horizontal pupils, thick curling ram's horns, and a long fluffy white beard dangling from his chin that made him look like a goat, showed him a little bit of how to use a violin. Harry didn't quite have the bravery to ask what he was, though the Headmistress explained once they left the classroom that the school had a fairly sizeable Lirren population, Lirren being an ancient artificial species of alchemical chimera, part human and part beast, created to hunt down and destroy Free Magic beings, and Jotunn – Ice Titans. Only throughout the millennia they gained sentience of their own, created culture, societies; they became a people.

And it wasn't just the Lirren students he found himself learning about that day either. He met a rather cheerful Centaur who spoke English with a heavy Russian accent who introduced himself without asking as Adrik, he further went onto quite enthusiastically telling him everything he wanted to know and a great deal more that he didn't about how tidal shifts affected various runic rituals in enchantments for an uncomfortably prolonged stretch of time that Harry didn't know how to politely extract himself from. The Headmistress had to rescue him from her enthusiastic student. He met a dwarf-girl in her fifth year and only an inch taller than him with a luxurious red beard down to her waist that she had in looping complex braids, she

complimented him on his eyes before she suddenly made an exclamation about her warding and rushed off with a shout of thanks for the inspiration. Harry had been very confused until Headmistress Winter reminded him that emerald was a good stone for storing magical energy, and complex warding sometimes required amplification, focusing, and storage of magic for certain tasks. Apparently his eyes had given the young lady the breakthrough she needed for her homework.

They went up the Right Wing tower to the very top, climbing a flight of stairs straight into the Astronomy and Astrology Classroom, decorated in bookcases and wall scrolls and a floating planetarium made of crystals before they went up further still to stand upon the ramparts of the tower. He got a beautiful view of the vivid blue roof, the improbable shade of pale aqua of the glacier ice, he could even see into the gardens in the main courtyard and down onto the jutting fin that stretched out from under the school. From his current distance, he could see it was a flight deck, quite a busy one, with brightly painted propeller-less planes, winged mounts, brooms, carpets, and many other things Harry had never seen before in his life, but he was suddenly interested in trying out. One of the planes swept past them, a figure with long twin-braids streaming out from under a brown hat and goggles waved and wiggled their wing-tips at him as they passed.

But beneath the school was where the cool stuff was. Passing Headmistress Winter's office, they went down the stairs to the first landing and into a cross junction. The one to his right would lead to the flight deck and Flying Club's office, the other took them to an underground garden, with a huge cherry tree scattering pink petals everywhere despite the fact it was definitely out of season. Grass, benches, flowers, even fountains, covered the area and three more corridors branched away from the cherry tree. A huge set of heavy double doors made of pale blue stone lead into the Repository, but all good things come at the end, and he found himself being taken down one of the other corridors to explore the Herbology and Botany classrooms. The classrooms themselves were not overly big, but they were also very spartan in the sense there was only the one thing in them. Glass bottles in the centre of glowing runic arrays, glass bottles that had little

gardens and environments within them he realised as he peered in through the pale green glass.

He sat in part of a Runo class, watched as they used the magic around them to work their will. A girl who made a pact with a living flame and walked through fire completely unharmed – the same could not be said of her shoes. He was allowed to try making a basic restorative in the Talismen and Spites class, he made something called a Faerie's Sigh, a little relief carving of a girl with wings enchanted to prevent him from being silenced or his magic from being pushed beyond reach. If ever it happened, to use it he would have to break it between his teeth, hence why they were considered a basic disposable Talisman.

It was then they broke for lunch, and returned to the Great Hall. There were a lot more students, but still no where near as many as Harry had expected as he trotted after the white haired woman. He tried desperately not to stare as a Troll got into an intense Arithmacy debate with a spider-centaur-boy, the two of them shoving cups and plates to one with impatient flicks of... those weren't wands, he didn't know what the spider used but the troll was using a huge hammer that glowed to channel her spells. Books were pulled out and slammed down and voices began to get intense and drew in other students from other tables.

He spotted Laerer Riveths at the staff-table, there was a shadow of a smile on her lips as she watched the increasingly heated debate unfold. She had taken the opportunity to change out of her suit and wore a simple cream-grey crushed velvet dress with a draping neckline and a single diamond drop necklace. Harry found himself glancing at the Headmistress who lead them straight for her and gestured to him to take a seat beside her.

"How do you find our school, Harry?" the blonde woman asked kindly as she sipped her drink.

Harry couldn't stop himself from squirming excitedly, "It's interesting. I haven't seen the Repository yet, or Mister Hyuga's lesson, he said I should see the Upper Years so I'd know what to expect. And I want to see the

Flying club too, what are the planes? I didn't think muggle technology worked around highly magical places though? Is it a kind of magical technology or is it enchanted like, taken apart and every piece enchanted before getting stuck back together enchanted?" he asked rapidly before he realised he had been asking too many questions and flushed, settling down warily in case he'd gone too far. He was usually much better at containing his tongue, at Hogwarts he would have never asked more than one or two questions at a time for fear of annoying the stern professors, even with friendly Professor Flitwick he kept his questions to a minimum. But throughout their walk, the Headmistress had often answered questions he had only half verbalised, only realising halfway through their walk that he hadn't been speaking the entirety of them out loud, he had been thinking them so loudly she had thought he said them out loud before answering. Knowing that his questions would be answered swiftly and completely, that he wouldn't be made fun of, or called stupid, or told to shut up, had emboldened him. And unbecomingly so.

But the woman was smiling indulgently as she shared a look with the Headmistress over his head.

"He is fitting in, isn't he?" she observed mirthfully as she set her glass down. "The planes in use by the Flying Club are indeed a magical construct. Paperwings are, as the name suggests, a glider made of enchanted strips of paper. It is a difficult craft to fly and requires extensive knowledge of weather magic and Charter Runes. Though some Wind Element students have used pure magical manipulation to pilot their crafts. As for your other questions,

"We refer to your 'muggles' as *Overse*; translated, it means 'overlooked' or 'ignored'. It is an old term dating back to the age of the Vikings, where those who were non-magical were believed to have been overlooked, or ignored by the gods who gave them their powers. The term has persisted to this day. And yes, you would be correct in that most magic is unable to function with magical saturation within the air. Niflheim's interference is particularly strong due to the amplification affects of the architecture. However, our Technomancy Club has made great strides forward in adapting *Overse*

technology for use within magically saturated locations. They have incorporated Overse information storage devices and are beginning to implement them within the Repository's Reference Library, and already they have hooked telephones throughout the school between offices. I believe the current projects they are endeavouring are a way of piggy-backing magical communication via Overse satellite connections, essentially creating magical mobile phones; and a portable archive system much like a laptop computer," she explained thoughtfully as she watched the debate down below and how it had grown to include five more students of varying ages and species, and even a visiting scholar, she snorted in amusement when the troll smacked her spider friend upside the head with one of her books, berating him at volume even as he scowled and cursed her hair purple.

Catherine chuckled quietly, "How long until they go?" she asked quietly.

"As soon as we're out of the room," the veela informed her indulgently as her gaze flickered to the students beside the buffet table loading their trays up with entirely too much food to be innocent. "It would not do to frighten off our prospective with a show of temper, or violence," she added as one of the Lirren students began to surreptitiously build something that looked remarkably like a portable ballista out of cutlery.

Harry looked between them curiously, with mounting suspicion, before he looked down at the students with careful eyes. Taking note of their movements, positions, what they had in front of them, the invisible lines in the sand. Like a Gryffindor Snow-ball match, or a paint-war within the common room, and he knew.

Food fight.

The moment the Professors were out of the room, all out war was going to occur.

Clearly that was the violence. So the show of temper must be the Professors punishing them for wasting food?

Professor Riveths made a sound of amused agreement, "Indeed. Catherine allows such antics, they amuse her, and she is even known for joining in and turning such incidents into abject lessons in battlefield tactics. I however am less indulgent. Any student caught wasting food, or starting conflicts, will be reprimanded severely by a week spent working in the kitchens," the blonde woman informed him, raising her voice ever so slightly causing the Lirren student who had been building the ballista to stare at her with the most unbelievable butter-wouldn't-melt expression on his face. He was probably too far away to see the woman's lips twitching the way that Harry could, as he began to slowly dismantle the ballista with an air of abject devastation when his awful attempt at innocence crumbled in the face of prolonged eye-contact.

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Harry half expected to hear the sound of a riot breaking out as soon as he left the Hall with the Headmistress, but as Professor Riveths had remained behind, there was no such thing. The two of them once again descended down into the basement garden and then into the Repository through the huge blue doors.

He had been expecting something akin to Hogwarts Library, or perhaps even Little Whinging City Library. What he got was something far out of his wildest imagination.

They stepped into a huge vaulted dome, three floors high and open all the way up to the luminescent pale blue ceiling dome. Thick wine red plush carpets cushioned under his feet as he stared up from the bottom floor. Endless filing cabinets curled along the walls of the ground floor, filled with thousands, *millions* of little white cards referencing the locations of various tomes, scrolls, tablets, and other texts of information. They circled the room like sticks caught in a whirlpool. The second floor, he could see, looked to be some manner of stationary store, selling all kinds of things from muggle notepads like he had seen in WHSmith, pens, pencils, calculators (magitech ones made by the Technomancy Club?), typewriters, and even art supplies. He could even see a little counter where a ghostly

human form made up of glowing runes was taking a small card off a student, doing something to it that made it glow, and then handing it back along with a receipt. And the top floor, closest to the dome... he assumed it was some kind of cafe judging by the people sat next to the railings with mugs, books, and slices of cake.

"This is the Dome, not quite part of the Repository as it was created by Niflheim, but it has become a part of the Repository all the same. Only a small percentage of the Repository has been explored, researched, and then catalogued. All these reference cards have been recorded and organised by the Library Exploration Club," Professor Winter explained as she opened one of the nearest little draws, pulling it out a good four feet from the cabinet to show him the many, many little cards. "The Technomancy Club has been slowly going through every one of these little cards and recording them into their computer experiments. They hope to have a working reference catalogue compiled within three years, complete with cross-referencing search engines. All one need do is input a key-word or phrase and the computer will give you the titles of any tome connected with the subject, a summary of the text, and a complete location of where it is in the Repository and whether or not it has been checked out by another student or is connected to another subject," she explained further as she gently closed the draw shut once again after showing him a few of the cards. "If you ever have need, merely ask one of the librarians or the Sendings that work here on where to find the text you're looking for."

Harry nodded, wondering if he should write to Hermione about this place. He was somewhat considering not. If he did, he didn't think he would ever see his friend again (he knew he would tell her though, no matter what, she would have loved this place).

"The ground floor is our reference library, over there to the left you can see a corridor branching away, that area is off limits as it leads to the personal quarters of our visiting scholars. With the exception of Madam Hyuga's medical bay, my office, and the Great Hall, scholars are not permitted within the school. With that in mind, respect the fact that students are not allowed within *their* quarters either. Even if they are invited. Understand?"

she asked sternly. She did not want another incident of scholars attempting to seduce her students in order to gain deeper access to the Repository than they were permitted. Not did she want incidents of paedophilia within her school (she would rip the genitals out/off anyone who attempted to defile her students and *nail* them through the wall of the scholar's wing with her broadsword as a stark reminder to the rest to keep their hands to *themselves*).

"Yes ma'am," Harry agreed timidly. She smiled. Madam McGonagall confided in her that Harry was a good boy, he just had a bad habit of finding trouble and doing his best to protect people regardless of the rules in place to protect him.

"Good. The corridor over there to your right has our Head Librarian's office, she has no tolerance for tomfoolery within the library so be sure to be on your best behaviour. Beyond her office is the Librarians' armoury, that area is restricted to students not part of the Exploration Club. The staircase at the back of the corridor leads down into the Librarians' office, details of unexplored areas are kept there. All students have access to the dome and several floors below, but given the extensive size of the Repository and the *danger* that accompanies it, certain areas are warded shut. You are not to attempt taking them down, Harry. They are there for a reason, the Exploration Committee take the safety of their fellow students very seriously, they work tirelessly to make safe the various areas within the Repository, cataloguing the knowledge within, repairing damaged wards, containing malignant spells and broken enchantments. Every wing must be thoroughly investigated before being referenced and opened to the school."

Harry nodded rapidly, the Library Exploration Club sounded dangerous, but also kind of cool. Exhausting too, he decided, watching as a young man in a blue waistcoat with a long rapier at his hip stalked past with a heavy white paperback in his arms. Harry got a glimpse of a title proudly declaring it to be a Chemistry text. It looked as though the Repository recorded mug-Overse knowledge as well as magical. He watched as the man left the book on a row of empty bookcases and moved to the corridor heading down directly in front of them.

"The bookcases here are for returns," the Headmistress told him, nodding to one of the ghostly humanoid figures as it shuffled out from seemingly behind a rack of reference cards to collect the book and drift off elsewhere without a sound, leaving just the faint fizzy light of his runes behind. "He will take the book back to where it belongs. They will do the same for any books left discarded within the Repository overnight, so take care and do not leave any personal effects behind after eight o'clock unless you remain with them. Or someone is liable to take them and attempt to categorise them somewhere," she warned with a small chuckle.

"The second floor there is one of the student stores, it will have most study materials there for sale should you need them. All of them can be bought via credit. It will be charged to your student I.D. And added to your loan, but don't worry, the cost is significantly less than what you would buy from Overse outlets as we can create them at no great cost or environmental impact. Above that is the group-work area, students working on things in groups more than three are encouraged to use that area as, I'm sure you've noticed, things can get quite passionate. Doing so within other areas of the Repository will disturb the other students, or worse, so we ensured there was an area for such things here. The cafe up there also has the best tiramisu I've ever had," she added with a conspiratory wink.

Harry wondered what on earth Tiramisu was before hastily trying to strange the thought so she wouldn't hear it.

Judging by the downturn of her mouth, he had not been successful. He really needed to learn how to hide his thoughts.

"All good things in time, Harry," she assured him sadly.

They did not go much further into the Repository, as Harry was still only a prospective student. They toured the dome for a little bit, Harry exclaiming excitedly over the various stationary supplies, he turned down the offer to try a tiramisu after learning there was both coffee and tapioca in it – he was not a particular fan of either. And then...

It was time to go.

He sat nervously within the Headmistress's office as she waited for one of the elves to show up with Harry's belongings. He had already been handed his equipment list for the new year, signed a few papers to say he was willingly enrolling within the school of his own choice, the quill tingling pleasantly between his fingers as he did so. He was half expecting a being like Dobby to appear, clad in a pillow case, bulging eyes, and a snotty nose.

The thing that stepped primly through the doors was *nothing* like Dobby.

"Sorrel, thank you for your hard work," the Headmistress greeted as the being levitated Harry's thing after him, Hedwig perched upon his trunk immediately taking flight and landing upon his shoulder with a concerned coo as she fussed over him and turned baleful golden eyes onto the Headmistress.

Sorrel was about as tall as Harry's shoulder, so not very high all things considered, but he stood straight backed with a strange kind of intense dignity. He, was hard to describe. His face was like a blade, thin, sharp, with a long nose, protruding cheekbones, and slanted eyes that would have looked almost Asian if they were not so *violently* upswept, looking more akin to slashes on his skin than eyes. His skin was a deep ash-brown colour, and his ears were long and pointed, yet floppy. He had silvery white hair in a multitude of tight braids that just brushed his shoulders, corn-rows he recalled Alicia calling them once, all of them topped with beads of orange and red. Instead of a pillow case, he wore a simple tunic of undyed slightly off-yellow/white linen, and beige slacks of the same colour. Upon his feet were soft-soled, almost slipper like boots made of brown leather. And yet, despite his simple clothing, and lack of height, Harry got the distinct impression that this being would gut him and not lose a single wink of sleep over it.

He said something to her that Harry didn't understand, at least until his belongings drifted forward and settled neatly upon the stone floor in front of them. He then turned to leave without a word, or a dismissal.

"The Elves of Niflheim are very different from those you are familiar with, Harry. Best to think of them as an entirely different species," Professor Winter told him kindly.

He nodded hesitantly as he stroked Hedwig. Wondering just what made Sorrel so different from Dobby when, arguably, they were the same species...

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There, via request, no cliffhangers. Now. It is twenty past three in the morning, and I am going to bed. Night night my loves. Hopefully now, with all this descriptive writing and the like out of the way, when Harry goes to Niflheim as a student, you won't get buried under all the fine detail of it all.

For those still wondering what Harry's pairing is: I don't know. He is twelve. I haven't planned for one just yet, but he may get one SIGNIFICANTLY later on. Like... three years later, later on. Maybe more.

6. Chapter 6

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

I do not own Harry Potter, Abhorsen, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, or Monster Hunter. I'm just playing with them.

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CHAPTER SIX

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The hostel the Headmistress portkey'd him to was nice. He didn't know what he was expecting, a dormitory like Hogwarts, perhaps a little like the Stubbington campsite dormitories he visited once at Junior school with Dudley, a huge long hall filled with bunkbeds and chest of draws. A modern five floored building that looked more like a hotel wasn't even close to what he envisaged when someone said 'hostel' to him.

He trailed in after the Headmistress, peering around curiously, Hedwig cooing softly as her head turned with him. It was a beautiful red brick and black mortar building with white trimmings and an almost violently arched roof, each of the windows was framed in bright white paint looking as though it had only been painted yesterday it was so clean. The building itself was placed on the waterfront, closely framed by similarly built structures, the one on the left having been painted black, and the other made of a much paler brown brick with white mortar. A number of bicycles were lined up beneath the high-windows on the ground floor as the two of them climbed the small staircase up to the front door, a huge dark green affair with brass knockers and a letter box with the word '*Niflheim*' emblazoned above it in brass letters.

The small hallway they stepped into was shiny and neat, and somewhat impersonal. Clean dark hardwood floors, a white staircase leading up to the second floor, there were a few paintings on the walls, landscapes framed in neat black metal lines, a plant in the corner, bright green and leafy in a blue pot as high as his waist. On either side were open doorways, one lead into a commons type area where there was a TV and a few childrens' toys scattered on the floor. A girl with feathers in her hair was sprawled out on the couch watching the TV and keeping an eye on the children at the same time. He could see a pair of twin boys, about six, maybe seven, with short white hair and long fluffy tails covered in black spots and rings. They weren't speaking a language he could identify as they called to each other, poking tongues out and wagging them to make funny noises as they played with colourful blocks and toy trucks that were for children much younger. He watched as one of them made gestures and noises to the girl on the couch to get her attention, when she tilted her head to look at him the two children moved into a flurry of hand gestures that Harry managed to vaguely identify as sign language, having seen the BBC interpreters in the corner of the TV sometimes.

"Harry," the Headmistress called, dragging his attention away from the living room commons. He quickly trotted after her as she continued down a small corridor under the stairs, leading him into a long office room with multiple desks. One of the Niflheim elves was working efficiently behind

one of the closer tables, the wall behind *her*(?) a sea of keys and tags. "Julia, do we have a semi-permanent residence room available?" the white haired woman asked the elf.

Much like Sorrel, Julia was a little shorter than Harry, stiff backed, with dark skin and silvery grey hair, a shade darker and almost purple by comparison to Sorrel, she wore a neat white blouse, black waistcoat, and slacks. Perched on the end of her long nose was a set of golden spectacles with a beaded chain dangling from the frames to drape around her neck. She peered at them from over the rims, her gaze landing on Harry and looking him up and down sceptically.

"Semi-permanent?" she echoed softly. Definitely female, her voice was very light and delicate, reminding Harry a little bit of a flute, strangely enough.

"It remains to be seen as to whether he will find a permanent residence with another family, or remain with us at the Hostel," the Headmistress explained neatly as the elf nodded knowingly already pulling open the filing cabinet in her desk and flipping through the aggressively colour co-ordinated files within.

"We have six semi-permanent residency rooms available. Two are doubles, we have a triple, a six-man room, and the remaining are singles," the elf detailed before casting Harry a look over once again, "Third floor, room two," she decided as she took a plastic wallet out of the cabinet and removed the papers. A moment later she turned in her wheely chair, snapped a set of keys from the wall and slid them over to the Headmistress. "Mister Arif is currently out at the moment, I will handle the paperwork. Should I instruct him to see you when he returns?" she enquired as she took up a pen and began to fill in the papers.

The headmistress shook her head, "Not tonight. Artemis and I will be busy assigning Mentors, Mister Potter is the last of our prospective students as the Gurdawara family opted to remain in India and homeschool young Arvinda," she explained as she collected a few papers that the elf handed over (Harry got the impression that the headmistress wasn't best impressed

with that decision from the way her lips thinned ever so slightly, and how the creases of her eyes deepened. She glanced down at him with a small twitch of her lips and nodded faintly. Ah, he had been right), "Here we are, Harry. Map, keys, hostel rules, and timetable. Tomorrow I will return with your assigned student mentor at noon, so be sure to get some sleep. Mister Arif is the head of this hostel, he will likely introduce himself to you later this evening to see how you're settling in."

Harry nodded mutely, staring down at the list of rules. They looked fairly standard, not that he really knew what would be standard, but they seemed reasonable and common sense enough. A bit similar to the Hogwarts ones. No magic in the hallways, no taking food into your rooms, curfew at ten, no inviting people into rooms, keep your rooms neat and tidy, etc.

Room 302 (third floor, room two) was about the same size as his room at Number four, a bed tucked against the wall to his left, a chest of draws at the bottom of the bed facing a desk on the right hand side of the room, a window on the wall between them showing him a review of the waterfront. A set of shelves perched above the desk, and a radiator spanned the short length of wall between the desk and the door with a mirror hanging above it. The carpet was dark teal, the walls magnolia, and his bedding was white. It was impersonal, clean, currently cold as the window was open a crack, and *it was all his for now.*

He loved it.

The headmistress left him at the door, reminding him about his meal-timetable as dinner would undoubtedly be soon, and Harry immediately moved to start unpacking. He would be here for a while. His trunk went under the bed, books on the shelves above his desk, his Nimbus propped up in the corner, Hedwig's cage atop the chest of draws beside his wizarding chess set that he got in his Christmas cracker last year, she hooted in approval and immediately moved to perch atop it and continued to watch him unpack, clothes going inside the draws – which smelt like 'fresh cotton' airfreshener, making him a little queasy, that smell would always make him want to vomit after a disastrous trip up to Aunt Marge where he caught a

stomach bug at a motorway services and spent the first two days at her farm throwing up in a bathroom with an automatic timer for the cotton smelling airfreshener. He would forever associate the smell with illness and immediately want to throw up.

But... for the first time in his life, Harry completely unpacked his trunk. All that remained inside was... his Invisibility Cloak. Not exactly something to hang on the back of his door like his old school cloak.

...Actually...

He took the cloak out and carefully draped it over all of the hooks, licking his lips as he stepped back and watched the cloak turn seethrough – along with the cloak it was draped over, but not the door as he had hoped. Nuts. He'd hope to have a seethrough section of the door with that trick, but he guessed the cloak needed to cover it properly. He put the cloak away while wondering if there was a charm or enchantment that would make things see-through like a two-way mirror. It would be nice to be able to see who was outside his room without them being able to see him.

He sat down at the desk thoughtfully as he stared out the window, tugging at the sleeves of his Weasley sweater as he watched the boats bobbing up and down on the water. He should write Ron and Hermione, even though she won't be able to read it until she was well again, let them know what was happening, and all about his new school and how he no longer had to stay with the Dursleys. Maybe they could even visit later? If the Headmistress allowed it...

Grinning a little at being able to share good news with his bestfriends, he dug out a quill and an ink bottle, dragging a sheet of parchment over and starting to write.

He was halfway through telling Ron about all the different flying things he'd seen at the school, from winged mounts, to Paperwings, brooms, carpets, and even animal forms, when there was a knock on the door. Setting his quill onto a stand, he quickly moved to the door, opening it a crack to peek out. He knew that the Hostel Manager was going to be paying

him a visit, the man that greeted him when he opened the door was fairly tall, he had a friendly smile, a thick bushy grey, silver, and black beard, his hair was tightly bound out of the way under a saffron yellow turban, his thick bushy eyebrows quivered as he smiled down at him. Hesitantly, Harry identified him as potentially Sikh, as he had the same little bracelet as some of his Junior School classmates, and he tied his turban the same way as he had seen their fathers do when they came to be picked up.

"Harry?" he asked brightly, his voice carrying a Finnish accent as he spoke English. Harry nodded and the man beamed, "Pleasure to meet you, I'm Simar Arif, the Hostel Manager."

"Hi," Harry greeted shyly, opening the door fully.

"You hungry? It's just getting dinner time if you want to grab a bite to eat," he suggested, turning to indicate the direction of the dining room.

Harry thought about it. He WAS rather peckish. It had been some time since his lunch at Niflheim this morning, and the tea that Madam Alice plied him with in her office was a distant memory. He nodded slowly.

"Just let me get my keys," he said, quickly hurrying back inside and snapping them up off the bedside table. He paused briefly and pushed the window open fully so Hedwig could fly in and out while he was downstairs, if she wanted to, right now it looked as though she were more interested in preening herself. He quickly told her where he was going, and stroked her a little before heading off.

"I'm ready," he announced returning to the door.

"Excellent. I don't know about you but I'm *starving*," Mister Arif exclaimed, rubbing his stomach with both hands. Harry smiled a little, he knew the manager was trying to put him at ease, but it would take a little while before Harry would relax around him, or anyone here really. Magic users they may be, but he had recently been reminded that they were just as bad as the Dursleys, sometimes a little worse. What had at first seemed like such an amazing escape, a refuge from those people, had within the two

years proved to be even worse because at least the Dursleys had never pretended to be anything other than disgusted and offended by his mere presence. The wizarding world was cruel in its insidiousness, in getting him to let his guard down, in getting him to WANT to stay there, before pulling the rug out from beneath his feet, and leaving him to flail and fall in a cold, lonely darkness.

They went down to the ground floor where Mister Arif showed him through the other doorway opposite to the living room where he'd seen the white haired twins earlier. Inside was a number of tables, even a breakfast bar, filled with people of varying species, ages, and genders, a buffet laid out on hotplates and trays against the far white wall. There was a lot of food on offer, most of which Harry didn't recognise in the slightest.

Mister Arif showed him where to collect a tray and begin queueing up for his food.

"We've got a lot of nice soups, this one here is Snert, it's a bit like pea soup? I think? We use split peas, pork, celery, onions, and leeks and mix a thick, stew, I think is the word," he explained, humming a little over his words, unsure of how to properly describe it in English. There were a few different soup options, and a few bread rolls still warm and soft from the oven. Harry took a roll and some butter on a small plate before they moved onto the long hotplate for the main foods where a more typical example of a House elf was stood upon a raised platform armed with a ladle and wearing a chef white.

Silvery hair gathered into a ponytail with a yellow ribbon, Harry hesitantly guessed it was female as it smiled at them. She bowed her head to Harry happily and began to list off the options, gesturing to each of the trays and bowls of food in front of her.

"Harry, this is Tilly our chef, unfortunately she only speaks Swedish. I'll give you a quick run down of what we've got here. There's the mushroom stroganoff here, Stampot there, here's a nice pot of chicken tikka dhansak, Patatje oorlog, enchiladas, and some bitterballen," Mister Arif explained,

gesturing to each of the dishes in turn. The stampot seemed to be a kind of mashed vegetables with sliced sausages, the dhansak looked like it had lentils in it, while the patatje oorlog was just a ray of chips with bowls and dishes of toppings to one side. The bitterballen however, Harry couldn't even guess at, they were breaded and deep fried balls of unknown fillings that he didn't think he was quite brave enough to try out just now.

"If I may make a suggestion?" Mister Arif suggested with a small smile, "Tilly does an amazing mushroom stroganoff, she grows the mushrooms herself at her little allotment in tubs of coffee grinds from the local offices here. One hundred percent recycled. And between you and me? She does better rice than Gully, the head chef," the manager added in a playful undertone, looking over his shoulder as if frightened the chef would come out to complain about what he thought of the cooking.

In the end, Harry went with the stroganoff, and got himself a slice of a thick ginger cake with butter and fresh fruit for dessert.

Mister Arif joined him at the table with his on stroganoff, and a drink of something dark Harry couldn't identify.

"So what sort of things are you into, Harry?" he asked warmly as he mixed some of the mushroom sauce with his rice. The Gryffindor peered nervously up at him, mouth already full. The bearded man grinned at him, "Since you're now one of my charges, I'd like to get to know you some, if that's okay?"

He swallowed thickly, "It's... okay... Uhm, I like Quidditch. I was..." He went a little pink, hunching up, "I was actually the youngest Seeker at Hogwarts in a century, I made the house team after my first Flying lesson," he admitted, pink right up to the tips of his ears as he admitted to perhaps one of the very few things he was genuinely quite proud of. His skill with Flying had been something innate, but he had trained it hard to prove to the others in the Gryffindor Team that he was *worth* his uniform and his broom. He'd heard the whispers in the Common Room, the ones that neither Ron or Hermione heard, the ones that hissed about how he'd only gotten the

position because he was famous. If any of them had broken the rules and gone flying without Madam Hooch they would have been in detention between then and Christmas, not given a place on the House Team. He worked hard to improve himself, and right now, he could genuinely admit without doubt or boast, that he was pretty damn good on a broom.

Mister Arif laughed, "So I hear. Pretty nice broom you got upstairs too. I imagine you'll have a few interested parties from the Flying Club looking you up when you finally get to school. Anything else? I think I caught a peek at a chess set, you play?" the apparently very observant manager prompted, stabbing a few mushrooms and eagerly devouring them with a small sigh of satisfaction.

Harry smiled around the rim of his cup of orange juice, "A little. My friend Ron taught me, but he's so good that I've never actually won a game." It was actually depressing to realise he had very little hobbies when forced to think about it, and almost all of them were magical in nature. Had he done *anything* for fun while living with the Dursleys? "I used to like drawing a lot. And fixing things," he admitted. A lot of the things he fixed were broken by Dudley or things that Uncle Vernon didn't want to *pay* to have fixed, so just threw at him along with a manual and a threat to have it done by the end of the week, but it didn't change the fact that Harry liked fixing and making things. He would wager he was the only boy in his Junior school who could rewire an alarm clock, never mind the fuse box he had to do once because Vernon didn't want to call an electrician and have to explain the suspicious cables he had in there. Harry never did find out what they were for, now that he thought about it.

Mister Arif hummed around his mouthful of rice, "Fixing things, huh? Overse, or magical?" he asked curiously after he'd swallowed.

"O-overse, mainly," Harry admitted, still stumbling somewhat over the pronunciation of the new word. He could tell he would be fumbling with the new terminology for a while.

"Can't say I'm great shakes at either of them, to be honest," Mister Arif admitted with a chuckle.

They spent the rest of dinner chatting, the hostel manager slowly getting Harry to open up about himself, they spoke about the school, Niflheim. Mister Arif pointing at a few other people in the dining room as fellow first years, Harry was more than a little dismayed to realise he really was the youngest, by a few years at that. After him, there was what looked to be a fourteen year old tengu girl with white hair and black feathers where her ears were, everyone else was in their mid-to-late teens with the oldest looking being a haughty looking young human woman of about seventeen, maybe eighteen.

As their mentors were supposed to be introduced tomorrow morning, most of his yearmates were already present, having been offered the chance to spend the night in the Hostel and be picked up for their shopping trip the following morning. Most of them had agreed to it, eager to meet their year-mates, and Harry could already see several friendships having been made amongst the students. But he could also see how they were sizing each other up, the same way Quidditch teams back in Hogwarts would do in the corridors on the lead up to a match, gauging who was stronger or faster, who looked the most confident, who had the most emotional insecurity, who was the weak link, etc. But it seemed as though he were completely beneath their notice as a year-mate, which he was a little indignant over, just as much as he was relieved as well. He'd had quite enough of drawing attention to himself, thank you very much. Bad enough he would apparently be the youngest in his year group, he wanted to leave it at that if he could.

It was as he was watching them, Mister Arif having gotten up to take their trays to the rack to be cleaned later, he noticed someone else sat apart from the group looking rather a little overwhelmed and out of his depth. A fifteen year old boy in regular clothes, he had that mildly rumpled look about him that reminded Harry of the Weasley twins, that whole 'I just rolled out of bed and grabbed the first thing on the floor that smelt okay' look.

"That's one of our American students," Mister Arif explained as he returned, making Harry jolt a little. "We don't often get them to be perfectly honest," the Hostel Manager explained with a shrug and a pleased smile, "Poor guy looks a little out of his depth, wouldn't you say? How about you go over and say hi?" he asked with a bristling smile down at Harry.

He wanted to say no, to be honest. He was a little out of his depth himself, given how he had been uprooted yet again and it hadn't even been twenty four hours since.

But, if there was anyone in the room who could understand that feeling, it would have been him, to be honest.

He nodded and got to his feet, making his way over through the semi-chaotic room to the curly blond haired boy with the rich golden tan in his rumpled baggy clothes and multiple sweaters. How he still managed to look cold despite wearing a fleece under his hoodie, Harry would never know but he found himself shuffling awkwardly beside the older teenager.

"Uhm, is this seat taken?" he asked quietly, clutching his cup tightly as the blond jumped a little and whipped around with wide brown eyes.

"You speak English!" he blurted, a heavy southern accent rolling off his tongue, "Ya, sure, sure, park it!" he exclaimed with a relieved grin. "Gawd, my head was beginnin' t' spin with all the mumbo jumbo here. Nice t' hear someone speakin' *my* language, y'know?" the boy laughed as he scooted a bit to one side to let Harry sit down.

Harry hummed a little nervously, it seemed as though this guy was very chatty. He was somewhat regretting coming over now.

"I'm Jesse, Jesse Carter. M'American, born an' raised down in Brunswick, Georgia. You?"

The Gryffindor grimaced, and hoped to hell that the 'Boy Who Lived' wasn't a thing over in America. "Harry Potter, nice to meet you Jesse."

The blond beamed at him, his brown eyes creasing shut with the force. He had very white teeth Harry noticed almost absently, "Back at ya' little man. Back at ya."

Harry smiled a little, closed mouth as he nursed his cup, glancing around the room once more. A few people had glanced over at the sheer volume of Jesse's voice, but for the most part they seemed to be being ignored by the collective students and residents of the hostel. Mister Arif gave him a discreet thumbs up from his table, and Harry grimaced a little as he raised his drink to sip.

"Are you going to Niflheim too?" Harry asked, figuring he should keep the conversation going. It wasn't like Jesse was bad company, just... loud, and a bit boisterous.

The blond nodded, "Yup. Big surprise when we got the invitation, but it worked out pretty good. I hated my old school, *hated* it. Crummy little inner-city Day school crap. Like, forty students total crammed into an old church hall warded shut to the no-maj. I ask ya', how ya' gunna get a decent game o' Quadpot when the best ya' can afford is a fuckin' swifer with a levitation charm yer cuz slapped on there?" he complained bitterly.

Harry blinked, "Err, quadpot?" he asked.

Jesse blinked down at him, "You've never heard of it?" Harry shook his head and admitted that he'd only ever played Quidditch. "Huh, we never could afford the balls fer Quidditch back at Saint Johns'."

And then he was off, explaining all about how awful Saint Johns' was, from the poor quality potions supplies, how the nurse seemed to think spitting on the wound and jabbing it with her wand was enough for any injury, how the canteen never served any decent food – he'd gotten food poisoning from gumbo once, how the hell did you get food poisoning from fuckin' *gumbo*, he demanded as if personally offended. Then came the long rambling explanation about Quadpot and how amazing it was, followed by how surprised his parents were to receive a letter accepting him into a school halfway across the world with *power-level requirements*. That just screamed

expensive private school opportunity. The fact that when the Talismen and Sprites teacher explained that his education costs would be placed on a tab for him to pay at his leisure upon graduation had his parents signing the paperwork faster than he could say '*but what about the food*'.

"I'm definitely lookin' forward to the Physical Defence Class, I got a chance to see the third years goin' at it, man, that was some *Naruto* shit right there!" he exclaimed excitedly, practically dancing in his seat.

Harry smiled, "Mister Hyuga's very nice, so's his wife," he added, thinking back to Yuri and Alice and their quiet offer to talk to him again about his Guardianship during the year, get to know him and in turn let him get to know them and see if he would be interested in becoming part of their little family – if he wanted.

Jesse grinned, "Really? 'cause, man, that guy was a fuckin' *beast*. Can't wait to get in on his lesson! Do you know who your mentor is gunna be? I hope mine's a hot chick, though a cool dude would be pretty awesome too," he mused happily.

Harry tilted his head as he sipped his drink, "What does it matter if they're male or female?" he asked curiously.

Jesse looked down at him and blinked, before grinning and laughing. He slung an arm over Harry's shoulders, startling him into nearly spilling what little was left of his drink before a hand found itself in his hair, roughly messing it up. Harry yelped as he found himself pulled in tight to a rather moist armpit and grimaced unhappily.

"I suppose you'll get it when yer older," Jesse told him confidently as he continued his affectionate half hug (re: choke hold, Harry decided as he tried to wriggle some space to breathe).

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I made it! With an hour to spare!

Also, meet Jesse, a character made specifically because Reyrey wanted Harry to have someone to learn swear-words from and to increase the number of humans in his year-group.

7. Chapter 7

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

I do not own Harry Potter, Abhorsen, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, or Monster Hunter. I'm just playing with them.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

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Jesse kept talking, and talking, and talking. Following him out from dinner and up to his room, exclaiming loudly that he had his own room, and then over Hedwig (who cracked open an amber eye to glare grumpily at him for waking her), and then going *completely* gaga over Harry's Nimbus 2000. Apparently he had only ever seen *pictures* of the racing broom.

"Say what ya like about the Brits bein' backwards ass tea-thumpers, no offence, but they know how ta build a *broom!*" he declared squatting in

front of it gleefully, not daring to touch it, or even breathe too hard near it. Which Harry was grateful for, his hands were getting a bit itchy with the need to put his broom somewhere safe, not that he thought the American would steal it, but... he didn't know why, he guessed it was a sting of possessiveness, maybe? Either way, Harry was glad he wasn't trying to touch it, he was... rather protective of his broom. Letting Ron fly it was one thing, he trusted Ron and knew he was both a good flyer plus, whatever was Harry's he also considered to be Ron's as well, kind of. But to let a complete stranger touch his broom? He was a bit uncomfortable at the thought, and then guilty for disliking the fact.

"Hell yeah, Transfiguration! I thought I was the only one here who knew it!" the blond exclaimed, having abandoned his drooling over the Nimbus to explore Harry's bookshelves. "Weird isn't it, that they don't have either Trans or Charms on the electives, huh?" he continued pulling *The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2* from the shelf. "Huh, Hogwarts really is top tier. We didn't start learning this stuff until fourth year," he observed as he flipped through the basic second year spells.

Harry blinked at him, "That's a second year text," he blurted in surprise. Seriously? They didn't start teaching these spells until *fourth year* in America?

Jesse nearly dropped the book, gaping at him, "Seriously! I only got this on my required readin' list last year! I mean, I know the spells already, but that's 'cause the corridor fights can get nasty. I'm still shit at the Disarming charm though," he admitted with a grimace. "Daaamn, I'm gunna be so behind when we get t'school," he moaned unhappily as he slumped in place.

Harry chewed his bottom lip, "Well, you won't be as bad as me, at least," he pointed out, trying to cheer him up. "I'm only a second year, I didn't even know I *had* magic until I was invited to Hogwarts. Niflheim looks really intense," he pointed out as he drew his feet up onto his bed, sitting crossed legged.

Jesse blinked up at him, looking stunned.

"Wait... *you're* attending Niflheim too?" he spluttered in shock.

Harry frowned slightly at him, "Yes..." He thought that was obvious, wasn't it?

Brown eyes went wide, "Oh my god, you're like... *ten*!"

"Twelve!" Harry corrected indignantly, but it didn't look like Jesse was paying attention anymore.

He was putting a hand to his head and looking as though his entire world view had been irrevocably changed, "I thought I was hot shit for being powerful enough to get accepted out of everyone else at school. But you're like, five years younger than me ("Three!" Harry snapped hotly, scowling. He was *not* ten thank you very much!) and already just as strong, fuck what do they *feed* you in England?" he moaned in disbelief.

Would it be going too far to kick him, Harry wondered, scowling.

"I am *twelve*, not *ten*," he stressed, glaring at the blond. "And if it makes you feel better, I don't think anyone else at Hogwarts has been accepted *either*."

It was actually a little odd, now that he thought about it. Hermione may not have been as magically powerful as him, but she was much more versatile. And he knew for a fact that Neville had hidden potential, he could see it like a cloak laid across his shoulders. The twins were pretty strong too. So why hadn't they been invited? Surely Professor Dumbledore would have also been just as powerful, if not more so, at Harry's current age, so why hadn't he been offered an invitation? Or was this, yet again, another *Boy Who Lived* exception?

The blond shrugged, "I'm not surprised. Hell, I was more shocked to see *you* here than anything else. The European schools have laws that once you've started a school you've gotta finish it, and you're not allowed to transfer. S'why when you get expelled from one, y'can't just go to another. Which is bullshit, what a *dumb* idea."

Well, that was one question answered. Apparently being expelled from Hogwarts meant no chance of continuing his magical education in Europe. But what did this mean for Niflheim?

"But... I *was* expelled from Hogwarts. Does that mean I shouldn't have been invited?" he asked anxiously.

Jesse peered at him, flabbergasted, "What the hell were *you* expelled for? No offence, but you're not exactly the delinquent type, y'know? You look 'bout as threatenin' as a damp kitten."

Harry grimaced, "I'm a Parselmouth. Something was attacking students, people thought it was me because I could speak to snakes and apparently that makes you evil." He shrugged aggressively, helplessly, still hurt and

Jesse's eyebrows were near his hairline, "You're a *Parselmouth*?! THAT'S SO COOL!" he yelled, pumping his fists, and nearly making Harry topple off the bed in shock. It apparently pissed his neighbours off too because a moment later there was thumping on the wall and angry Finnish swearing at them. Jesse paid them no mind, leaning forward with stars in his eyes, "Do you have any idea how useful that'd be back home? Dad takes me boatin' down Florida to see Uncle Shane and we keep runnin' into these *huge* pythons. No word of a lie, one tried to snatch Rambo, my uncle's dog, clean off the boat! Dad smacked it in the face with an oar and it swam off real quick but it had to be about thirteen feet long, *at least!*" he gushed rapidly, grinning from ear to ear. "Folk in England only think Snake Speakin's evil 'cause you don't have snakes that can *kill* you. Everywhere else in the world where you've got shit like fifteen foot constrictors or cotton mouths or mambas think Parselmouths are the shit. Our History teacher back at Saint Johns was Native American, he told us about how the Aztecs used to practically worship their snake speakers. They were considered precious gifts from the gods and were exempt from *all* ritual sacrifice unless it was like... world ending shit. The only time any magical aztecs ever sacrificed a Snake Speaker was during a Solar Eclipse when they *actually* thought the world was coming to an end. Over in China, Parselmouths are automatically royalty. The moment one's found, they're snap married or adopted into the

Emperor's family, no exceptions. An' last I heard, they're considered pretty much national treasures by the Australian Magic Users. Oh man, there's gunna be a *shitstorm* when word gets out that a Snake Speaker got expelled for being what they are from a British school!"

Jesse looked as if he were relishing the fall out. Harry was pretty sure he had gone pale, and a little queasy looking.

A mental note: Never go to China.

But Jesse didn't stop there, "I bet you'll dominate in our Healing classes, Parselmouths have a natural affinity for healing magic an' shit. S'why the caduceus medical symbol has two snakes around a winged rod. Two snakes mean a Parselmouth healer, one means a regular healer," he explained, sat cross legged on Harry's floor now, holding his feet as he lectured. "The no-maj use different stuff, but that's how it goes in Hospitals over in the states."

For someone so worried that he would be at the bottom of the class, Jesse was actually pretty knowledgeable when it came to World History. His trivia knowledge about various subjects was extensive, and he had absolutely no problem with sharing it as Harry learned the hard way. The friendly American boy going on, and on, and on, seemingly quite content to carry the conversation himself with only minimal input from Harry. The minimal apparently being vague eye contact and the occasional noise from his audience.

It was *well* after dark by the time Harry's jaw cracking yawn finally managed to jar the blond out of his excitable babble.

"Oh no, I kept you up late with all that useless crap! I'm so sorry! Ma always said I was a total motor mouth. I'll let you go to bed! See ya tomorrow Harry!" he exclaimed, whirling out of the Gryffindor's room at speed.

How could he maintain that degree of energy at this time of night?

Harry glanced over to his desk, giving passing thought to finishing his letter to Ron before deciding against it. He changed for bed, slipped out of his room to visit the bathroom facilities down the hall where he brushed his teeth and did his business before going back. He drew the curtains over the still open window, shivering a little at how frigid the room was, but unwilling to close the window and trap Hedwig inside. He tugged his cloak off the back of the door and laid it out over his bedding as a second blanket before crawling in. With the cloak on top, the chilled sheets quickly began to warm up and before long he was nice and snug.

And completely dead to the world, sleeping hard and deep, without dreams.

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He finished his letter off before breakfast and sent Hedwig away with the rising sun to deliver it. She had slept well and the cool air had done her some good, one of the things he was constantly worried about was how overheated she could sometimes get in the summer months. Hopefully with the colder climate they were moving to, she would be more comfortable.

He opened the door to Jesse pacing just outside, muttering under his breath, looking frazzled. He was wearing regular muggle clothing, trainers, jeans with a few holes in the knees that Harry could see leggings through, and a black high-necked fleece under an orange and blue american football hoodie with the number 28 emblazoned across the back in white piping. His somewhat curly blond hair was sticking up at the back of his head as if he hadn't brushed it.

"Harry!" the boy yelped, spotting him, quickly raking a hand through his hair, patting it down and ruffling it up before pulling on it. "Hey man, ya sleep well? I didn't wake ya, did I? Oh man, I didn't wanna wake ya so I just stayed here, I thought we could go down to breakfast together, since ya know, we're friends an' all, right? Right. We're friends, right?" he asked nervously, once again dragging his fingers through his hair.

Harry shifted uncomfortably outside his door, "Uh... sure?" he asked faintly.

He didn't have a chance to say anything else before he was being dragged into a headlock, "Fuckin' A!" the blond shouted excitedly before starting to drag Harry down the corridor. "I hope they have pancakes downstairs! I'm starving. Do ya like pancakes, Harry? Mum don't make 'em much – " aaaand he was off again. Harry grimaced and managed to wriggle himself free, drawing the edges of his cloak tightly around himself like a blanket, and snuggling into the dark fabric to ward off any further attempts to touch him. He did not like people touching him, even Hermione, arguably the most cuddly of his friends, respected that unspoken desire.

Mister Arif was waiting for them in the foyer, "Ah, boys, if you two would step in here? Your mentors have arrived and will be assigned as soon as everyone is present."

Jesse glanced between the living room and the dining room with a conflicted expression, "Can – can we get breakfast first, Mister Arif? I'm starving," he asked hopefully.

The Sikh gentleman laughed, "I'm afraid not, Mister Carter. It's something of a tradition for the mentors to take their students out for breakfast, you'll just have to wait until you're assigned," he explained and gestured them into the small living room where a few of their yearmates were already waiting.

The six people already present almost to a total did a doubletake at the sight of him, and Harry drew his cloak a little more tightly around himself, uncomfortable with the staring.

A boy with a wide face and large flat nose, and horns turned to Mister Arif, grunting something to him in what Harry managed to identify as Norwegian, Mister Arif laughed and replied cheerfully to whatever it was that had been asked, and suddenly the other six students were all *gaping* at him. Harry grimaced before hunching over.

A boy with long brown dreadlocks interspaced with leaves shook his head, "I apologise for them," he said, his limbs creaking like wood as he moved closer. "None expected someone so young to have been invited. I am Nikos Petridis, of Greece," he introduced with a graceful bow of his head. At a

guess, Harry pegged him as about maybe sixteen. He most definitely wasn't human, his features were very beautiful, classically Greek in much the same way as he had seen pictures of busts and statues of Olympian athletes, but his skin was a very queer texture, looking more like pale treebark than anything, his eyes were a bright dragonfly green, and now that he was closer, what Harry had first thought were dreadlocks he could now see were actually willow-tree fronds with still living green leaves growing from them, leaves the exact colour of his eyes.

Harry quickly realised he was staring and shook himself, "Sorry, I – I'm Harry Potter, um, of England? It's nice to meet you," he greeted, bowing a little more clumsily. Judging by the small smile that creased across Nikos' face, that had been the right thing to do.

"I am a Willow Dryad. I take it our kind are not common in England?" he asked kindly, no doubt having noticed Harry's staring. The Gryffindor flushed in embarrassment.

"I – couldn't say. I've never seen one, but, I only just... I only – I only found out about magic last year," he admitted, his voice dying to a near whisper as he once again became aware of people staring at him.

Nikos nodded, "I did not think so, though I had hoped." He turned to Jesse and bowed his head, "I apologise for my poor manner, may I ask your name?"

The blond blinked rapidly, having apparently been staring at him in abject confusion the whole time, "Uhh, J-Jesse Carter. American, from Georgia, East Coast. Does your hair grow flowers in spring?" he asked in a complete daze.

Harry winced and immediately wished the floor would swallow him whole when Nikos' expression wavered for a moment.

"No. I do not. Only those over the age of twenty summers can flower," he explained, mild as milk smile still upon his grey-brown rough features.

"Oh," the American said.

Harry looked up at the ceiling, silently begging someone, *anyone* to interrupt and save him from death via mortification.

Thankfully he apparently didn't have to wait long as the Headmistress appeared in the doorway with Mister Arif, the Hostel Manager smiled at them all as he quickly passed through the room with a box of what looked like small clip-on earrings in a box. He seemed to pause every now and again to quietly explain what they were to each of the eleven students in the room. Harry, Jesse, and Nikos were last.

"Handy little translation enchantments," Mister Arif explained in English when he reached them, "You'll learn how to make them in your enchantments class later. You'll hear every conversation translated into your mother tongue, but be aware that you will not be able to speak any other language but those you already know. They just help you to understand," he explained softly as two sets of earrings were given to each of them. They were all different looking, and made of various substances, some looked like regular bog standard earrings, others had been stylised to look like animals climbing up the sides of their ears. Nikos collected a simple set of red beads to clip to his ears, Jesse eagerly grabbed a set that made it look as if he had tiny dragons clinging to his ears, and Harry collected the first he touched, a pair of small silver wings that went on the tips of his ears.

"Now that we're all equipped," the Headmistress began, speaking in Norwegian, but only English registering in Harry's mind. That was so weird, awesome, but weird. *"I will be introducing you to your mentors shortly. They will have the requisit papers, your equipment lists, student handbooks, etc. I will expect good behaviour from all of you. Some of your mentors will be younger than you are, but bare in mind they have been attending this school for three years already. You will respect them. Am I clear? I do not wish to assign detentions before the school year even begins, but rest assured, I am not above it,"* she warned seriously as she overlooked each and every one of them, meeting their eyes and holding them until she received a nod. Satisfied she reached into a pocket on her coat and

withdrew a sheet of paper, "*Elizaveta Vasilieva, please step this way. Your mentor is waiting outside.*"

Harry watched as the oldest in the room got to her feet, she was a pretty young woman, maybe eighteen, maybe nineteen, tall with dark hair in a ponytail, and heavy eyebrows over equally dark eyes. She nodded to the Headmistress and stepped out of the room in silence, and without a backwards glance.

"*Yasin Mohammed, this way please,*" the Headmistress announced after a short pause, no doubt to give the mentor outside the chance to introduce themselves to Elizaveta and take her somewhere else.

Harry watched as a vaguely asian boy of about seventeen, lanky and tall, with rich dark skin and the beginnings of curly facial hair whiskering at the corners of his mouth got to his feet and after glancing at the boys he had been sat on the couch with, hurried from the room with a murmured comment to the Headmistress that Harry was too far away to hear. Again they waited for a moment until the Headmistress spoke again.

"*Nikos Petridis, this way please,*" she announced, the Dryad gave a small bow to Harry and Jesse before turning away and making his way to the door, once there, he turned and bowed to the room as a whole once again (only a few of them bowed back, Harry and Jesse amongst them), before turning and stepping through.

The next two were both Lirren boys, Magnus Berg being the one with the large wide face that first spoke when Harry came in, he looked like some kind of buffalo type Lirren with a faintly hunched back and a huge, absolutely *huge* barrel chest and broad shoulders, his thick dark hair was like a curly rug that extended from the top of his head, down his back and around his neck almost like a luxurious ruff. Next to him, Topi Lahtinen was both tiny, but easily identifiable by comparison as a Lynx based Lirren, his bestial ears tufted right at the very tips, and his sideburns long and caramel coloured with white tips. By this point it had become rather

obvious that they were being called up according to age, oldest through to youngest.

After them was Jesse, who suddenly grabbed Harry's hand hard enough to crush it a little.

The Gryffindor's mouth opened soundlessly in pain as his whole body curled a little. The blond didn't notice, he was swearing under his breath, chalk white, and sweating a little in horror. The Headmistress smirked a little in amusement, "*I promise she doesn't bite, Mister Carter,*" she assured him and, now eager, Jesse released Harry's now very sore hand and flashed him a grin and a thumbs up before practically jogging across the room. Now sunshine and daisies with the knowledge that he had a female mentor.

"*Viivi Tuominen, if you would,*" Catherine called once she felt they had given Jesse enough time to be dragged off by his mentor, whomever she was. Harry watched as one of the few girls in the room got to her feet, and found himself staring in unabashed awe.

She had wings.

Not only just a spray of feathers tucked behind her ears in shades of black and white, but also draped across her back were a set of *huge* black wings with white undersides. Her head was completely bald, no hair at all save for her eyebrows, and the small spray of feathers tucked behind her ears. At first, Harry thought she must have been some kind of *vulture* Lirren before remembering the Headmistress explaining that the Lirren did not have aquatic, or avian subspecies. This girl was what was more commonly known as a Tengu, a bird person. A condor tengu.

After her was another two boys, both fifteen. A Viking blond Dwarf of about fifteen, complete with luxurious beard possessing gold and copper highlights, by the name of Joakim Olsson, and a white fox Lirren by the name of Ausrine Urbonas. Then the youngest in the room aside from himself, a fourteen year old girl by the name of Ingrid Dahl, a magpie tengu with *considerably* smaller wings than Viivi. Harry didn't know if it was because she was a magpie or if she just liked them, but she was decked out

in a great deal of silver jewellery and other sparkly things, like a silver top made entirely of silver and mother of pearl coloured sequins.

Then it was just him.

The Headmistress smiled at him, "*Harry Potter, if you please,*" she announced, not changing her manner in the slightest, which was relieving as he didn't want to be treated any differently to his classmates.

Swallowing nervously, Harry squared his shoulders, he was a *Gryffindor*, he had agreed to this new school thing, gone to another country to get his education, he could do this. It was no-where near as scary as going through the trap door.

He marched across the room and nodded to the Headmistress before stepping into the Foyer where his mentor was waiting.

He was very white, Harry decided at first glance.

As in, the colour *white*, not the ethnicity. His mentor was a Snow Leopard Lirren with pure snow white hair, ears, a tail long enough to touch the floor, and eyes such a pale blue-silver they looked almost colourless. The young man smiled at him. He looked to be about sixteen, a little below average height, his white hair was somewhat long, framing his face and just brushing his shoulders, he had a narrow cat-like nose and high cheekbones, his face was patterned with small dark grey marks that looked almost like dirty smudges but Harry could tell were actually skin discolourations, markings that dotted his cheeks, framed his face, and lined his eyes. He wore a normal dark grey knitted polo-neck, and washed out jeans tucked into a pair of heavy black boots, a chain hanging from one belt-loop to his back pocket, likely attached to a wallet. Harry couldn't help but notice his tail was *very* fluffy. Like a huge length of tinsel tucked into the back of his jeans.

"*Harry Potter?*" the Lirren asked, Harry nodded and his smile warmed considerably, "*Name's Ira Nim. Call me Ira, I'm your mentor. Nice to meet you,*" he explained, sticking a clawed hand out.

Harry accepted it, unable to stop himself from staring down at his hands as they shook. He had *very* velvety soft hands, or rather, paw pads, Harry realised when he felt the difference in texture between his palms and the sides of his fingers. His nails were more like hallow sheaths at the tips of his fingers, and when they pulled their hands apart, Ira flexed his fingers and five *very* wicked scythe-hook like claws slid from those little sheaths.

"I'm a Snow Leopard Lirren, in case you couldn't tell. Don't be shy about asking questions if you want to know anything, I'm here to help," Ira explained with a smile as he relaxed his fingers and allowed the claws to slide back under his flesh.

"Cool," Harry managed to get out, much to the older boy's amusement.

"Glad you think so. What do you want for breakfast? It's something of a tradition for mentors to take their charges out and get to know them. I know a really good pancake place," he offered with a friendly smile.

Harry found his lips twitching upwards almost without noticing, "Pancakes sound good. I've always wanted to try them," he admitted, beginning to relax a little.

Ira opened the front door, *"Well, what are we waiting for then?"* he asked brightly.

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I have been wanting to introduce Ira for ages now. He's actually one of my oldest surviving OC characters from back in secondary school, over a decade ago.

Hope you guys enjoyed the chapter, don't worry about the sudden influx of OCs, you won't be expected to remember all of them. Still, I hope you liked the few extra world-building points here, Hogwarts is supposed to be the best, and Jesse comes from a very minor Inner City magic school with barely 40 students in total. It stands to reason that a very underfunded inner city school in an abandoned church would

have significantly poorer standards than a very private boarding school in a castle with thousands of years worth of history as a school behind it.

8. Chapter 8

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

I do not own Harry Potter, Abhorsen, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, or Monster Hunter. I'm just playing with them.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

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Harry froze half-way down the steps outside the Hostel, his expression twisting in sudden horror as the scene in front of him sunk in properly.

Ira. In all of his fluffy, feline *obviously non-humanness*, stood in the middle of a **muggle** street.

The lirren paused, glancing back at him in askance before he suddenly grinned up at him in amused understanding, and reached into his poloneck,

tugging a number of necklaces out. Gemstones, beads, feathers, even rolled up strips of paper could be seen on various different strings and chains.

"Talismen. You need magic to see through them, so to all the Ignored around us, they just see some blond haired kid instead of the internet's biggest wetdream," he explained mirthfully with a small shake of his head as Harry flushed in disgust at his use of terminology. *"They work like that nifty little earring of yours, definitely a subject I recommend you look into."*

Harry nodded slowly, glancing to the non-magical people he could see cycling up the road, they didn't pay the lirren a blind lick of notice beyond making sure not to run him over as he stood in the middle of the road. Well, if ghosts and other magical creatures could manage it, it kind of stood to reason that there would be a charm or enchantment to do the same. He hurried down the steps of the hostel to street level and the patiently waiting young man.

Ira flashed him a smile, *"C'mon, the pancake place is about a twenty minute walk from here. Don't worry, I'll pay, it's tradition,"* he added when he caught sight of Harry's expression falling.

"I- I don't want to be a bother," he objected weakly.

Ira waved a hand, *"I want to,"* he stated easily as he lead them down the mostly empty street. He, thankfully, did not hold a hand out to be held, nor place an arm over his shoulder as Jesse had done the night before, but rather just glanced back and slowed down in order to make sure Harry could keep up as the two turned off away from the docks into a much busier pedestrian street. Everyone was wrapped up warm as they hurried too and fro, pretty ladies in knitted scarves and hats, fathers herding noisy children in thick winter coats, seagulls wheeling overhead and calling to one another as they eyed the streets in search of food. Ira carefully lead him through the bustle down the street, over a small bridge that crossed one of the many canals, and down another street before he gestured to a small brightly coloured place called 'Stakks'.

"Here we are. Best pancake place in Amsterdam, guaranteed," he declared with a grin before marching over and opening the door, Harry hurried after him.

It didn't look all that impressive to be honest, very open plan with the kitchen and the seating area being separated only by a counter, allowing customers to see their food being made. Wooden tables with padded wooden dining chairs surrounding them, a brightly coloured menu tucked between two mason jars, one holding knives and forked wrapped in napkins, the other holding a wooden spoon with a table number. The walls were decorated with large posters of the various pancakes they had on offer, Harry goggled a little to see one served with what he managed to identify as chilli con carne (on a *pancake*?!), and mushroom stroganoff with another. Against the far wall was the till, and a variety of tea boxes and a sign offering real Italian coffee, made to order. It was pretty normal in all honesty.

"Pick a table any table," Ira told him with a grin, gesturing to the room at large as he began to peel off his coat. Not that he had much of one, apparently he didn't feel the cold as much as a human did.

Harry glanced around before choosing the one next to the radiator, and quickly snagged the seat closest to it, Ira chuckled but made no comment as he dropped his coat down and sat down, hovering for just a moment so he could manoeuvre his tail into a comfortable position before actually sitting properly. Harry watched, fascinated despite himself, and his better manners, telling him to stop staring.

Ira caught him and smiled, flashing him a wink, *"The chairs at Niflheim are all one-sided with the backs, so students with tails can sit comfortably,"* he explained, he set a strange rock in the centre of the table, it was yellow and had a strip of paper on it bearing what looked like Chinese characters inked upon it, before taking two of the menus and passing one over, *"Drink section is just over there,"* he said, pointing it out on his own menu, *"And you've got sweet pancakes here, savoury ones here, french style toast, and*

waffles here, pick out what you like and I'll go order them," he explained with a friendly smile, offering no explanation for the strange rock.

Harry immediately started looking for the cheapest thing on the menu only to have a clawed hand snap its fingers under his nose, he jerked, and Ira smirked at him, *"I said what you like, not what's cheapest, Harry. Seriously, I want to buy you breakfast, but if it'll make you feel better, next time it's your turn, alright?"* he offered kindly.

Slowly, the former Gryffindor nodded, "Alright. That's... yeah, I can do that," he agreed, now much more comfortable with the idea. He looked back down at the menu, deciding to ignore the savoury list and its variety of weird decidedly *non*-pancake related substances. There was a traditional lemon and sugar one, maple syrup and bacon, fruit pancakes, ones with cakes, even a black forest gateaux one was listed – complete with a picture up on the wall above the kitchen area. They even had choices between thick fluffy american style pancakes, european crepes, or mini-pancakes.

Eventually, he went for bacon and maple syrup pancakes in the end, not feeling particularly adventurous this early in the morning. He also asked for a hot chocolate, as even with the radiator behind him, Amsterdam in February was *chilly*, it was much much too cold for the vanilla milkshake, listed as being made with french vanilla icecream, he originally gave thought to, that Ira was now ordering for himself.

The lirren smiled when he sat back down, muggle receipt in hand, tail flicking idly under his chair where it wouldn't be stepped on. *"So, shall we get to know each other?"* he asked gently, and Harry felt nervous all over again as he began to pick at the wool of his Weasley sweater. *"Don't worry about talking about magic. The talisman here will ensure that no one really notices what we're talking about,"* he explained, tapping the odd rock he had put down earlier. Harry nodded, wringing his hands a bit under the table. *"I'm Ira, as you know,"* the older boy began, deciding to go first in order to put Harry at ease, *"I'm sixteen, this is my first year as a mentor, so if I'm messing this up, just tell me, if you're uncomfortable or unhappy I'm here to help. Mentors are supposed to be your older siblings at school, pretty much. I was actually among one of the youngest students to attend*

the school at thirteen, there've been a few hundred throughout the school's history, but it's still pretty rare. I've got two little brothers who live at the hostel while I go to school, the headmistress took us in when Teacher Bacon found out about our sorry circumstances. I'm a third year at the school itself, I'm focusing on trying to become a healer when I graduate. I've only got a few more credits to earn before I can ask for an Apprenticeship with Madam Hyuga, she usually takes only three at a time so it's massively competitive to get the rights. I heard that someone tried to sabotage the competition a few years ago, and ended up losing any opportunity for an apprenticeship with her or her already graduated students. I'm in the water elemental classes, and I'm part of the Library Exploration Committee as well as the Exorcism Club. My favourite colour is blue, and I love mint icecream," he added with a small playful grin as Harry relaxed back into his seat.

Harry flustered a little, he'd never had to introduce himself before. Everyone had always seemed to know him before he knew them, even in muggle school the other kids knew about 'that Potter Troublemaker' and steered clear of him, either because of his reputation, or because of Dudley's 'encouragement'. Then at Hogwarts, it was a case of everyone knowing more about him and his family than *he* did.

"I-I'm Harry Potter. I'm twelve, I turn thirteen this year. I – I got expelled from Hogwarts for being a Parselmouth, someone who speaks to snakes and understands them," he explained, spotting the look of confusion on Ira's face, maybe the word hadn't translated via his talisman correctly? "I used to be a Gryffindor; all the students get split up based on their personality when they get to Hogwarts, Gryffindor for the brave, Ravenclaw for the studious, Hufflepuff for the loyal, and Slytherin for the ambitious. I got into Gryffindor," he admitted with a small proud little smile, "I played Seeker in our quidditch team, the youngest in a century. I uhh – I have a pet owl called Hedwig, she's super smart and can find anyone *anywhere* in the world!" he bragged excitedly, pausing briefly to let the suddenly appearing waitress set down two mason jars with handles in front of them, a very dark brown one for him, and a frothy white one with little black dots in it for Ira, a hot chocolate and a vanilla milkshake. "I... don't know what I want to be

when I'm older, I've never given it much thought. But I'd like to try out the flying club when we get to Niflheim, the paperwings looked pretty cool. Uhm, my favourite colour is red, and I like treacle tart best," he added with a small smile, echoing the ending of Ira's own introduction.

The lirren chuckled, "Well, you're in luck. *The captain of the flying club happens to be my bestfriend, Esme. I'll introduce you two on the boat if you'd like?*" he offered.

"Boat?" Harry echoed curiously, blowing carefully on his hot chocolate. It would burn his lips and tongue if he tried to drink it right now, but, ooh goodness it smelt good.

Ira nodded, "Yup. *Because of the wards we can't just magically transport everyone onto the closest island. The wards would recoil and then lash out. We gotta take the long, slow route as there's so many of us. The wards are smart, but only so much. We'll get the boat from the docks here in Amsterdam, sail up and around Svalbard to a small port hidden at the bottom of Nordaustlandet island, once we make land, we'll be sledding into the school like on your open day. Once you're in your second year you'll have the option of either taking a sled or riding one of the mounts, but for the first time you'll be with your mentor, me in other words,*" Ira explained easily as he dug out knives and forks from the masonry jar next to the menus. "*The school itself is unplottable, amongst other things, so I couldn't even show you on a map where it was, nor really describe the way to get into it. It's just one of those things you've got to be shown. Personally, given how Svalbard was sunk and then raised again, I think it's a lot bigger than it is now. Half of it must still be underwater, especially given how the Repository is. It is huge. One of the earth elemental students took a gander at it via seismic vibration, said it was ornate and decorative on the outside. The kind of stuff you only bother with when you want it to be seen. So we're currently theorising that the Repository was actually above ground for quite a considerable amount of time, but after it sank, it only partially surfaced along with the rest of the country when the Vikings came.*"

It was at that point the waitress returned, this time bearing their much appreciated breakfasts. Fluffy american pancakes with maple syrup in a little leaf-shaped bowl and bacon for Harry, lemon and sugar crepes for Ira.

The two thanked her before descending upon their food with teenage appetites, they chatted a bit more between mouthfuls about the school. About how once they arrived they'd be given a few hours to wash and change into their uniforms, begin unpacking, explore a little, before going to the Great Hall for the Welcoming ceremony and opening feast.

"We'll have to wear our Dress Uniforms for that," Ira told him as he drizzled a little more lemon juice on his last crepe. "We get two uniforms officially, three if you're part of a particular club like the library explorers or the flying club. Casual uniform is just a poloneck, waist coat, and trousers in black and red, any variation of the two you like. You can even customise it a bit, adjust the cut, add a bit more, put patches or badges on, embroider runes, you name it. Whatever. But Dress Uniforms are for special occasions. Black trousers, black poloneck, black jacket with red lining and trimming. You're not allowed to adjust it though, at all. You'll get pins and badges though, for things like special services or awards. Like for me, I'll have a mentor pin this year, and I'll also have a Healer one as I passed my level five exams, I'm as skilled in healing magic as a fully qualified Healer, I just don't have the official paperwork yet. Esme, my friend, would have a club badge, because she's the head of her club. Meanwhile, my other friend, Setsuna, would have a mentor pin, a potions club pin, and two special awards, one for inventing her own potion and patenting it, and the other for collaborating with a known potions master in creating another. She'll also have one to show she's on the level of a qualified potions mistress, just without the papers, like my healer one."

Harry nodded as he chewed his bacon, absently deciding that the odd combo was really good, and he'd have to tell Ron about it later. "And we're going to go and pick all this up today?" he asked warily, wondering how they were going to carry all of that back to the hostel. He didn't particularly want to buy another trunk, his first one was perfectly fine.

"Yup," Ira nodded, "I'll show you how to get into the magic quarter, take you to Gringotts for a student bursary, and then we'll pick up the essentials before we really get going. If it gets a bit much, just say, and we'll make a second trip tomorrow. You can pay for breakfast," he added with a playful wink.

Harry snickered to himself, even as he asked, "Essentials?"

"*A foci, to replace your broken wand,*" he said, and then offered a sympathetic smile when the twelve year old flinched unhappily. "Yeah, I heard about that. Messed up, isn't it? Don't worry though, he'll get you another. It isn't the same as your first, I know, but stick around Niflheim long enough and you'll be swimming in foci eventually. I've got three personally, but there's a guy a few years ahead who had eleven at last check. I don't even know where he hides them, one minute he's empty handed, then BOOM magic everywhere, absolute anarchy, and a lemming. I don't get it, he's obsessed with lemmings." He shook his head in a mixture of awe, amusement, and confusion. "Anyway, a new foci, and a Bag of Holding, pretty much a bottomless bag you can store anything in, but disposable. They'll last a week at most which makes them cheap and cheerful convenient shopping bags. Then I'll take you back to the Hostel, and if you want, we can hang out. I've pretty much got until the week before the start of term to hang out with you as much as you'd like."

Harry blinked at him, "Really? What about your brothers?" he asked, he was pretty certain Ira mentioned that he had little brothers.

The lirren winced, grimacing a little, "They aren't expecting me," he hedged unhappily, explaining no further.

Harry grimaced, "Ah, sorry. I shouldn't have said anything."

Ira shrugged a shoulder, "Not your fault. Things with us are... complicated. The twins are better off without me. I bring up too many bad memories for them." He tried to smile then, the effect was somewhat ruined by the fact his ears were still pressed down, betraying his true feelings. "Shall we push on? Lots to do today," he pointed out with false cheer.

The former Gryffindor nodded easily, anything to escape the awkward atmosphere now choking their little table.

The two quickly finished their drinks, and pulled their coats back on, Ira stowed his little rock back into his pocket, and the two of them left the restaurant without a backwards glance, stepping back into the bitter cold outside. Harry shivered and bundled himself up even more tightly within his cloak, eyeing the lirren enviously because it didn't seem like he even *noticed* the temperature in his lightweight jacket.

"Where is the magic quarter?" Harry asked as they went down another side alley.

"Right under your feet, amusingly enough," Ira answered, his ears managing to lift a little. "You'll hear rumours of catacombs in Amsterdam, but if you go looking for them, you'll never find any, in fact, if you ask the locals, they'll all tell you that's not true. But, it is. We just hid them. Down here," Ira said, suddenly changing direction down a very small back alley, Harry stumbling as he tried to keep up. *"The access points are varied, we're going in the closest one, it's hidden under a bridge down here. There's a magical ferry that drifts down the canals and enters in via a small storage dock for the ferries. After that it's a bit of a maze, the Charter Marks usually guide people where they need to go, but right now you haven't even gotten your Mark, so you can't see them. Don't worry, you don't need them to get in, but it does make it easier to find your way around."*

Harry wrinkled his nose, but made no comment as they came to a busy bridge with cars slowly trundling across in two lanes. Ira led him down the pavement to the river-side, and down a small set of stairs to the ferry docks. Then, to Harry's surprise, he ignored the walk way, and passed under the bridge to a small storage door that he pressed a hand against. The heavy oak rippled with glowing blue-white runes that rippled out across the doorframe and around them before sucking back in, and vanishing the door.

Ira flashed him a smirk over his shoulder, "*Coming?*" he challenged before stepping into the darkness.

Harry nodded eagerly and plunged in after him.

Black swallowed him for a moment, and almost as if he were fighting his way through cobwebs, he found himself stumbling into a dim corridor filled with a dull fiery glow. He quickly realised why when he looked around and spotted Ira with a fistful of fire in one hand, his pale features stained gold and orange with deep red shadows.

"Nows as good a time as any to give you this," Ira announced, rummaging in a pocket and presenting him with a slip of paper, his equipment list Harry realised as he smoothed it out in the light.

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EQUIPMENT LIST

PARENTS BE AWARE:

All required clothing, equipment, etc, can be purchased at the Midnight Market in Belgium; the Troll Market in Detroit, Michigan; and Helheim Quarter in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Replacements and repairs can be found/done at the Student Market in Niflheim's Mulusaphon Hall until one week after the start of term on student credit.

UNIFORM – All students will require:

Seven uniforms – casual,

One dress uniform,

One furlined Parka (full length – any colour but white),

Thermal underclothing,

One waterproof (full length – oil skin or nylon),

One facemask with breathing and heating enchantments,

One set of goggles (prescription if required),

Three sets of protective gloves (dragon or graphorn hide).

Please note that all students' clothing should carry name tags or personal Charter Marks/Runes.

GENERAL EQUIPMENT – All students will require:

One or more Magical Foci (swords are not allowed as Primary foci),

One bottomless bag (backpack/messenger/purse/etc),
One Multi-compartment trunk (standard Niflheim will have three compartments, a library roller, and apothecary storage),
One silver bowl (standard size 2),
One Penseive (standard size 4),
One Apothecary Potions kit (B-grade or higher),
One cauldron (stainless steel, standard size 4),
One set measuring equipment (standard Niflheim set will have glass beakers, enchanted measuring cups and spoons, and runic scales).

COURSE BOOKS WILL BE HANDED OUT WITHIN THE FIRST CLASS FOR FREE.

All other pieces of general equipment for personal electives can be picked up at the student market on Credit.

STUDENTS ARE REMINDED THAT WHILE PETS ARE ALLOWED, THEY ARE NOT TO HARM OTHER STUDENTS OR PETS, AND MUST HAVE UP-TO-DATE SPELLS AND CHECKS – CERTIFICATION FROM A REPUTABLE VETERINARY CLINIC REQUIRED.

SIBLINGS ARE NOT PETS.

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Harry stared down at the list in abject confusion. The books would be given out in the first class, for *free*? And a cauldron made of *stainless steel*!?

"I... already have a trunk? Can't I just use that?" Harry asked warily as they moved through the corridors. He could see the gleam of runes on the walls, mixed in with graffiti, glimmering like jewels in the flickering golden light from Ira's fire.

The lirren chuckled, "*Nah. It wouldn't be big enough for all the stuff you'd need. They hand out a lot of books, and the potions kits are extensive, amongst other things. Hence why they're enchanted to have three compartments, and specific storage chambers for not only your books, but also for your potions' stuff. You can still bring it, but I can't see you really*

needing it unless you go overboard and buy too much," he explained as they passed a huge image of blue and white giants breathing ice storms down on a collection of golden figures, it practically *glowed* with those blue-white runes.

"Ira, what do those runes say?" Harry asked, stopping to point at the mural and how the repeating knot pattern of Viking styled borders had thousands of them twisting throughout it.

The lirren paused and looked at the mural before back at Harry, his fire gold eyes blowing dark and wide in surprise, "*You can see them?*" he asked in surprise, Harry nodded hesitantly, he couldn't exactly lie now after asking him what they meant. Ira looked back at the wall, "*Those are Charter Marks, Harry, a magical runic language that pre-dates a lot of wanded magic used in the West today. I'm surprised you can see it.*" He turned towards him and lifted a hand towards Harry's face, but stopped, "*May I?*" he asked politely, hand hovering at his forehead.

Harry eyed him warily in confusion before shrugging and nodding. He didn't think Ira would hurt him, or do anything weird.

Instead, the lirren placed the pad of his thumb against Harry's forehead, right between his eyes. Whatever he saw must have satisfied him because he flashed a small smile and pulled away, "*I'm surprised. Not many non-M.E.N. Magical countries bother with the old birthing rites. You have a Charter Mark, kiddo. It's a little corrupted, probably due to that death curse you got touched with, but its healed a lot since then. It's definitely doing something though, otherwise you'd have had to be trained in it before now, or start attracting undead. We'll have to talk to Teacher Vasterstrom when we get to school though. Madam Hyuga is an incredible healer, but she was never a Charter Mage, there's some things she can't deal with because of that,*" Ira explained as he reached up and pressed a finger to his own forehead, in front of Harry's eyes, a small symbol glowed icy white on his forehead, between his eyes. A triangle with a curving J running through it in a sharp sweep.

He then turned to the mural, "It tells a story," he explained, gesturing to the figures, "How the Frost Giants of the Void Beyond Creation attempted to bring the universe to nothing. How this state of existence is a constant pain to them, so they wished it gone, and went to war with the Warriors of Light, the Aesir, to destroy it. The Aesir fought valiantly, but alone against a never-ending tide of beings from Nothing, they faltered. Until the Seekers, winged Valkyries, searched the whole of creation for aid and found us. Proud warriors slain on battlefield, snatched from the cold fingers of death, brought to the golden halls of the Aesir and offered food, wine, and women, for their aid in combat, in battle against the Frost Giants. And so, the legend of Valhalla was born. It's a pretty stylised Sci-Fi retelling of the Norse mythology that I'm pretty much ninty-nine point niiiiine percent certain was drawn by a student ages ago. Must have been a Final Year student because the enchantments on the wall have withstood so many attempts to remove or graffiti over it, it is unreal. The spell work is almost as much of a work of art as the mural itself. You'll see loads of similar ones at various entrances. I think one of the ferry ones has the tale of Icarus on the walls. How he fell in love with Apollo, only to fall into the ocean and be abused by Poseidon until he went to Underworld and become a companion for Hades whenever Persephone returned to the surface. Not as a lover, but a friend. I do like that one," Ira praised with a chuckle as he began to move off.

Harry stared at it a little longer, eyes tracing the golden figures that stood head and shoulders above even smaller figures he hadn't seen before now clad in silver with stylised Viking helms and shields. And a single figure that carried a bell?

"Harry?" Ira called back to him.

The Gryffindor hurried after him, "Sorry."

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Helheim Quarter was a huge underground maze of cavernous catacombs riddled with canals and bridges, and near-slum like houses and shops

belonging to non-humans and magic users. Harry stuck close to Ira as they wove through the crowds in one chamber, the Gryffindor ducking under the swinging elbow of a troll three times bigger than the one he saw in the girls' bathroom last year, wearing muggle jeans and a T-shirt, a set of dogtags around his neck and tattoos winding up one arm. He had to step over a small gaggle of six inch blue figures squabbling over a shopping list, shaking their little fiery red heads as they pointed to one item and complained that the store didn't sell it, and if they didn't come back with that one item their mother would not be happy. A pair of girls walked past, one of whom boldly wore a crop top revealing her prosthetic *doll's arm* to the world regardless of the temperature.

The buildings were made of old dark wood and brick, black wrought iron, and dark grey slate, black ornate street-lamps were everywhere with glowing orbs providing light, the streets were dark grey and red stone without railings or protections from the dark water to one side. Bridges could be anything from wooden planks, stone arches, Chinese styled moon bridges, or just stepping stones across large expanses of water. And on occasion, Harry would see something moving in the water, a face, the flash of a fin.

"Are merfolk real?" Harry asked as he saw what was most *definitely* a face in the darkness to his left.

"*Oh yes,*" Ira agreed, "*They've got quite the community here, fishmen too. Don't let the names fool you though, Merfolk tend to be your classic half-humanoid-half-aquatic beings, fishmen are humanoid but with aquatic variation. There, see the guy over there with the green grey skin and striped pattern? With the jut on his back? That's a tigershark fishman,*" Ira explained, gesturing discreetly to a *huge* man on the otherside of the canal wearing board shorts and a bright yellow Hawaiian shirt with palm-trees printed across it in varying shades of eyebleeding fuchsia and lime. "*There's been some trouble over the years with racism, but it seems to have largely died down. Most that decide to come up and mingle are pretty chill. A few are looking for a fight, but they're easy to tell apart from others,*" Ira

continued as they crossed one of the more sturdy stone bridges and entered into a wide plaza type area with a Gringotts branch to one side.

Harry was somewhat curious as to whether or not this one would be the same as the one in England. When they went inside, he couldn't see it though, the lay out was the same, but the goblins seemed so much more relaxed. There were guards, but nowhere near as many, and a few of them weren't even goblins. He could see a troll stood to one side in the guard uniform, bone spurs jutting out from his arm guards and plated with sharpened metal caps. One of the tellers looked to be a veela, and there was a human behind the currency exchange. Also, the little poem about stealing wasn't there either, just a ring of charter marks above the door that flashed briefly as they stepped inside.

"Ira... I... I'm – I mean... I got expelled, but I still have money. Does that qualify me for the student bursary? Has the ministry confiscated my vault?" Harry asked nervously before they got much further than the front door.

Ira shook his head, "*You were expelled, Harry, not arrested or fined. Your vault should be fine, but we'll talk to an advisor and see about getting it transferred here, if you'd rather?*" he suggested, already leading Harry away from the various teller desks to a smaller desk set towards the back next to a corridor that stood opposite from what the Gryffindor managed to identify as the cart chamber.

An elderly Dwarf looked up, her bell hair ornaments chiming sweetly as she smiled through her snow-white beard at them, "*Good morning, gentlemen. How can I help you?*" she asked promptly as she set aside a few papers and gave them her full attention.

"*Good morning, ma'am. I'm a student mentor at Niflheim, my charge would like to ask a few questions regarding his vault within his homeland, is anyone available to facilitate us?*" Ira asked politely, nodding to Harry as the dwarf shuffled a few papers about under her counter.

"*I believe we have Tarock free at the moment, if you will please excuse me, I will fetch him immediately,*" she told them, climbing to her feet.

"Please," Ira requested, stepping away from the counter and flashing Harry a reassuring smile. The Gryffindor returned it somewhat weakly, this was way over his head, he had no idea what he was doing, and was a little terrified because of that, even with Ira helping him along. Eventually, a goblin in a neat uniform with carefully trimmed facial hair joined them, his pointed face seemed clever, but much kinder than Harry was used to from a goblin. The cultural differences seemed to just keep piling up the more he saw and heard.

"Welcome to Gringotts. I am Tarock, if you'll follow me please?" he asked, gesturing to them to follow him down the corridor. It was carpeted and filled with neat purple booths bearing tables and chairs, a few were occupied but as they passed, the papers on the table all looked blank, and nothing could be heard from the people inside, and their mouths seemed to blur if Harry paid attention to them, as if he were going cross-eyed or seeing double. Cool. "Please take a seat," Tarock requested, stopping at a booth and gesturing them inside.

Once Harry and Ira were sat, Tarock ran a finger down the side of the booth and the whole thing shimmered with unknown magic for a breath, Harry's ears popped as the air pressure changed.

"As a Gringotts advisor, I can guarantee our conversation will not be overheard, or divined from outside this booth. Now, gentlemen, how can I help you today?" Tarock asked, sitting down and lacing his fingers together on the table in front of them, his face the picture of attentiveness.

"My name is Ira Nim, I'm a third year student mentor at Niflheim Academy. My charge, Harry Potter, has a Gringotts vault within your London branch, and has expressed some concerns as to whether or not it is available to him after his recent expulsion from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and whether or not his assets can be transferred to your vaults here within the Netherlands," Ira explained succinctly, sending Tarock immediately rifling through papers he pulled from a draw under the desk.

"*One moment please, gentlemen,*" he requested as he flicked through the papers at speed before withdrawing a particular folder and running a finger across it, "Do you perchance know the number of your vault, Mister Potter?" the Goblin asked in English.

"Uh, no. But I do have my vault key, if it helps?" he asked, immediately rummaging in his pockets. He kept his vault key attached to the little coin purse he filched from Aunt Petunia in his first year, inside were a few sickles and knuts, but it was usually enough for a few sweets on the Hogwarts Express.

"That will be perfect, Mister Potter, thank you," Tarock said as Harry handed the key over. He examined it carefully before tapping the folder with it and then opening it up. Inside, letters seemed to be *crawling* across the page like ants, until they finally began to line up in uniform columns and lines. Harry watched in fascination as lines stretched across the page, and swung into place like heavy beams, until, in front of his eyes, a financial report was laid out in front of him. Tarock hummed as he observed it, "Do you have your other keys with you, at present?" he asked.

Harry blinked, "Other... I wasn't aware I had other keys," he admitted quietly.

Tarock's expression flickered for all of a heartbeat, too fast for him to make-out what emotion it was though. He shuffled through the papers in the little folder too fast for Harry to read any of the words, a quick glance showed Ira not even looking at them, but rather at the goblin himself, a small frown creasing his feline features. "I see. Mister Potter, according to the financial records attached to your trust vault, you have in total seventy three vaults within the London Gringotts branch. You are unaware of these?" Tarock asked delicately, peering up at Harry who wheezed in shock, all the blood draining from his face as he stared, agog, at the financial advisor. Tarock straightened up, his face definitely pinching with disapproval. "I see. If you gentlemen would please give me a moment? I will contact my British contemporaries to confirm our records, I apologise for the inconvenience at this time, excuse me," he told them politely before gathering up the files,

and Harry's little vault key, and bustling out of the booth with a face like thunder.

Harry felt a bubble of hysteria choke him, "Seventy three?" he found himself squeaking in disbelief.

Ira was in much a similar state, staring almost wall eyed where the goblin had been sitting previously, "Yeah. Wow, that's... wow," he managed to get out, a little uselessly. The bubble of hysteria threatened to spill from his lips. Wow. Yes. That... that about summed the situation up quite nicely.

Harry coughed a little, unsure of whether he should be laughing or crying because, surely that was a mistake, right? Seventy three vaults? With that many, surely one could have been assigned to the Dursleys so they could afford to take care of him, right? Or, or, he didn't know. Why hadn't Hagrid told him? Did Hagrid know? Dumbledore supposedly had Harry's trust fund key until it was given to him, did Dumbledore know? Did he have the other keys? Why wouldn't he say anything if he did know? Why hadn't *Gringotts* told him? Surely if it was his money, they had to, right?

Harry's head was swimming and he was feeling very jittery and shaky inside and out. He drew his cloak around himself and tried to calm down. What did it mean really, that he had so many vaults?

A lot of money. He had a lot of money. If that was indeed, all that was in them. And why would there be other things? Vaults were like bank accounts, they were *actually* bank accounts, just underground, and the money was coins of precious metals instead of paper. Or even very large blocks of gold that one shaved gold from. That was where the British gained their currency name from, the 'pound'. Back in the day, it would quite literally be a pound of gold in the shape of a coin that one would take small pieces from in order to pay the household expenses. So. He had seventy vaults filled with gold, silver, and bronze, potentially jewels too, *maybe*. He did recall seeing a goblin weighing rubies the size of coals the very first time he set foot into Gringotts. It was a possibility, unless he was just evaluating them.

He had money, money could support him when he didn't have any adults to do so. That was good.

But what if it really was an error, and that money didn't belong to him?

Nothing would change then. He would still have his trust fund, and that should be enough to prevent him from being completely overwhelmed by debt while attending Niflheim.

He took a deep breath, and relaxed, rolling his shoulders from where they had knotted up uncomfortably. Ira shot him a sharp look, silver eyes assessing.

"I apologise for the wait," Tarock announced, returning to the booth with a significantly thicker stack of files. He set them down and slid Harry's little vault key down before retaking his seat and beginning to shuffle the variety of files. "I have spoken with my colleagues in the London branch. I am pleased to inform you that there has been no clerical error with your records, you do, indeed, own all seventy three vaults. From what I have managed to gather, these seventy here, are willed to you via somewhat dubious wording that in essence boils down to 'the one who defeats Voldemort'. A few have been contested by family members in the past, but the matter of Wills cannot be overturned. The vaults and everything within them at the time of the original owner's passing now belong to you.

"This would be your trust vault, automatically arranged and filled as per tradition on the day of your first act of Accidental Magic," he further explained taking one folder from the top of the pile and sliding it over, "the contents of which in summary equates to five hundred galleons in total, a hundred of which being sickles, and fifty of which being knuts.

"This would be your paternal family vault. As the last of your line, this vault now belongs to you. Within is the typical collective wealth of your line, heirloom objects such as family tapestries, wands, enchanted jewellery and weapons, enchanted armour, etc, as well as papers of patents, deeds of ownership, and business partnerships. Marriage contracts are also stored, I would recommend reviewing them with a trusted solicitor, and hasten to

inform you that such contracts can be nulled after a century without backlash onto either family, no matter what anyone would like to inform you. This is a service that Gringotts offers at less than a galleon per contract here in the Netherlands." If anything, Tarock looked a little nauseated at the idea of marriage contracts, speaking of them with a very delicate tone of revulsion in his voice.

"And finally, this vault here is an Ancestral Vault. There are stipulations to gaining access to them, strict guidelines and requirements. Of all the vaults within your possession, this is one such that *cannot* be transferred here I am afraid. As the terms for accessing an Ancestral Vault are typically very private, I will be turning this folder to you for your perusal at a later date in private. I do not have an itinerary for this vault, I am sorry to say," the goblin explained, handing the thin folder over to Harry with a solemn expression.

"Thank you," Harry said as he accepted it. Well, his trust vault, his dad's vault, and now this ancestral one, which he assumed was an ancient Potter vault or something. He would have to find out what the standards to get into it were later.

Tarock offered him a thin smile, "You are very welcome, Mister Potter. Now, I believe there was mention of vault transferral?" he prompted politely.

Harry nodded, "Um, I'm starting Niflheim this year, would it be possible to transfer everything to a Gringotts branch *here*? I don't..." he flushed a bit, "really trust the British Ministry anymore," he admitted, and he'd been awake long enough in Binns' History classes to know that the Ministry thought little of using the many loopholes in the goblin laws they wrote up and forced through after the last Goblin wars to try and seize people's money and assets whenever they could.

Tarock nodded primly, making a few notes on another sheet of paper, "Of course, Mister Potter. Will that be all seventy two vaults?"

"Please," Harry said awkwardly.

Tarock made another note, and Ira coughed politely.

"If Harry is agreeable, may I suggest three vaults? One for his monetary assets, one specifically for his own family's heirloom objects and papers, and the other for the non-monetary assets within the inherited vaults?" he recommended neatly. Harry nodded when the goblin flicked a look towards him.

"Yes please, that, yes, if I may," he added hopefully. It would be nice to know which of his new belongings were actually his family's and not someone else's.

"Very well. I shall have our people organise it immediately, and further inventory the seventy into one vault. Likely as not, we can have your trust and family vault here within the week, and separated as appropriate. The seventy will take longer. Would you like inventory to be done at the end, or as we empty each vault?" the goblin asked as he continued to make rapid notes in runes that Harry couldn't understand.

"As each vault is emptied, if we could," Ira answered when Harry looked at him in poorly concealed panic. The lirren flashed him a wink, and Harry relaxed. Nice to know he wasn't going to be left high-and-dry with all this on his own.

Tarock jabbed his pen onto the page, marking a full stop, and flashed them a sharp smile of satisfaction. "Of course, gentlemen, it will be done. Now, may Gringotts help you any further today?" he asked brightly, seeming to relish the amount of work they had just lumped onto him, that or the opportunity to deprive the British branch of a large amount of gold had tickled him somewhat.

"If we could collect a small loan of Hack to purchase school supplies, and reimburse from the vault transferral, it would be appreciated," Ira told him with an equally toothy smile.

"Of course, if you would follow me to the front desk, I will see to it immediately," Tarock told them, his smile positively beautific.

Looking between them, Harry wondered if they were trying to intimidate one another by bearing their teeth. If so, he kind of figured that Ira won. Having a leopard's dentistry was somewhat more intimidating than the very minor tusks that the goblins had hidden in their lower jaw. The goblin took all the files on Harry's vaults, and opened up the draw under the desk where he originally pulled the first one from and put them all back before leading them back out of the booth.

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There we go, an extra long chapter. I actually planned on getting a lot more done, but, yeah. Motivation returned and I just kept writing. Hope you enjoyed it. I lost the last two pages and ended up having to rewrite after a bluescreen of death, originally I included a lot more of the financial crisis that england faced after the first war with Voldemort, but in this one, I couldn't remember what I wrote or how, or even why it came up. So eh. Something for another time maybe.

9. Chapter 9

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

I do not own Harry Potter, Abhorsen, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, or Monster Hunter. I'm just playing with them.

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CHAPTER NINE

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Hack, as it turned out, was the currency of magicals across the northern territories, apparently even some places in Russia still used it, though it was frowned upon. Hack were simple silver coins, unmarked, but when probed with magic, heavily enchanted. Apparently they were a hold-over from the Viking age when currency was literally just silver, anything that could be found. Hacksilver were tiny bits of silver often times coming from other objects, such as locks, hinges, jewellery swarf, and other such things. If it were silver, it could be used as currency back in the day, and the term stuck

around even when the goblins started to melt their hacksilver into coin for ease of consistent value. The word shortened to Hack, and the value of the hack coin was set, and everyone eventually adopted to it as it was less mess, fuss, and fighting overall with a widely accepted value to a single coin.

Harry knew none of this though when he received a small money pouch filled with coins, and a few slips of papers that were basically a magical version of a cheque. He would be told, in detail, later that evening by a hyper-active and overly excited Jesse, but for now, he was blissfully ignorant as Ira took him out of the bank and immediately to the trunk and bag shop to get both a bag to carry his current things in, and a Niflheim trunk.

The trunk shop looked more like a high-class boutique than anything else, something he would have expected in the muggle world with white display tables and cabinets, an entire wall dedicated to various styles of bags, and designs, bright lights, and shop assistants in neat muggle suits and shirts with plastic smiles. He felt dirty and not allowed as they perused through the shop, Ira looking remarkably unkempt next to the sleek black cat lirren in his neat black suit and white shirt attending them. They ended up leaving the store with a bottomless dark blue backpack, and a handsome dark lacquered rosewood trunk that had five locks and aged brass fastenings and rivets, paying for it all with one of the little magical cheques.

Shopping with Ira was... a whirlwind. He didn't believe in browsing so much as getting what was on the list and getting out as soon as possible before someone tried to rob them, or convince them to buy anything else.

When it came to clothes though, he was willing to hang around, even help Harry choose things. Harry needed to pick up some personal clothing as almost everything he owned were hand-me downs from his cousin that would not keep him warm enough in Svalbard, and the rest were his Hogwarts uniforms. Thick cargo trousers in varying shades, sweaters and polo-necks in a myriad of colours and designs, long-sleeve shirts and T-shirts for layering, thermal underclothing, the thickest fluffiest socks imaginable, even slippers – though Harry couldn't help but think they were

a little overboard, even if he found them funny, a pair of sharks that he slipped his feet into so it looked like they were eating him from the foot up.

After that they collected his uniforms, having to be measured for his formal set, they got him his parka at the same time, a nice deep red one with black wolf fur lining and a deep hood with a drawstring that could be pulled in tight. A double layered waterproof, a blue facemask with the appropriate charms, and several sets of graphorn hide gloves at Ira's insistence ("They're sturdier than dragon hide, and a lot more flexible. You'll thank me when you start marathon brewing sessions."). Once they'd finished getting everything, his dress uniform had been finished so that got packed away in his trunk along with everything else, and they made their way to the apothecary – which couldn't have been more different from the one in Diagon Alley if it had actively been trying. It looked like a *Tesco Express* mixed with a pet shop!

Harry couldn't help but stare around them in confused fascination as Ira collected a B-grade potions kit, and several other extra jars, packets, and bottles so he could brew a few things in his own time outside of lessons ("You're so tiny, Physical Defence and Battle Magic are going to be brutal for you. Better get enough supplies to keep you in bruise balm till the new year."). They got his stainless steel cauldron, a glass measuring kit, a silver bowl, and various storage containers for completed potions on top of a series of potion labels and tags that had adhesive backs to be put onto the jars or bottles so he would know what was what without having to guess by colour or consistency.

"*What's left?*" Ira asked as they stepped out of the shop, casually pulling down his face mask as he did so. The strong smell of the apothecary did not agree with most lirren, and thus far Harry had not found it to be *uncommon* to see one wandering around with some manner of facemask or nose clip since they came into the area. Lirren weren't the only ones either, even humans were wandering around with facemasks, along with several other species Harry didn't recognise or remember the names of.

He fumbled with his check list, "Uhm, I need a penseive, and a magical foci. Oh, and I need to take Hedwig to the vet, she needs checks, only she's out on a delivery right now," he explained, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose as he squinted at the list.

Ira hummed, *"The distance between here and England isn't too big. She should be back within the week. If not, when she arrives we'll just take her to Laerer Matteson. Are you having trouble seeing?"* he asked before suddenly whisking his glasses off his face, Harry yelped at the sudden abduction, and again as Ira's hand was suddenly over his eyes. He fell silent when a curious blue glow enveloped his vision, and much like if someone had thrown a *lumos* charm up unexpectedly in the pit black dorm room, only to snuff it immediately he could see the spidery shadows of his own veins all over the surface of his retinas.

"Those glasses are the wrong prescription," the lirren observed as he lowered his hand and returned the glasses. *"A stop at the opticians as well, I believe."*

"What's a prescription?" Harry asked curiously as he slid them back onto his face, blinking rapidly to banish the dark spots dancing in front of his eyes.

"It's the specific numbers needed for personalised equipment and medication. Prescription drugs are specifically chosen and weighed and numbered for your use. Prescription glasses are specifically designed for your eyes. Those glasses aren't strong enough for your vision, that's why things further away are pretty fuzzy and blurry. If someone with weaker eyes than you wore those glasses, they'd work better for them than for you. If someone with stronger eyes did, it would look even worse for them," Ira explained as he checked his watch and began to lead them down a few side alleys. *"We'll do the opticians first so we don't forget about them. We can pick the glasses up on our way out,"* he explained as they stepped onto another busy road.

It was odd.

It was busy, but the further along they went, the more the people around them became scarce, it wasn't that they just didn't seem to come this way, it was more that they were deliberately moving away from it.

It became only to obvious why when Ira cursed under his breath, and caught Harry's shoulder.

"*Russians*," he murmured, eyes slitting as he observed a group of rather hard bitten slavic looking men in neat black uniforms up ahead. "*Harry, no matter what gets said, or how these guys move, you stay behind me, and don't move. Okay?*" the lirren told him softly, looking down with a face carved from stone. "*Things might get a bit violent, but you need to stay exactly where you are, alright? I can't guarantee your safety if you move away.*"

Harry's mouth went dry and he found himself nodding anxiously.

"What's going on?" he asked softly as the men moved down the street, and Ira's ears began to fold back as he carefully ushered Harry closer to the river-side.

"*The Russian Ministry of Magic have been trying to seize control of the Repository for the last couple of years,*" Ira explained softly, with narrowed silver eyes, "*It started small, at first. Petitioning for Scholars to have access, the Headmistress refused, reminding them that they have their own Repository with the exact same records inside. Then they tried to force apparate several troops in, they got dunked in the North Sea and nearly froze to death.*" Harry grimaced, shifting a little closer to the lirren as the men loomed over a young dwarf woman who cringed away but did not move from where she had been examining the shop windows of a weaver. "*They started tracking down students the year I started to attend. Threatening them and their families, forcibly trying to get information on how to bring the wards down, or how to get people inside. The Headmistress has caught three spies already, sneaking into the school in various forms. Flying in by broomstick, someone under Polyjuice amongst the students, we still don't know how the third got in.*

"It's weird," Ira muttered as the men came closer, "They have their own Repository. But they're trying so damn hard to get to ours. I wonder what they want," he murmured softly even as he shifted and placed a hand protectively in front of Harry as the three men in uniform came too close for comfort, crowding around them.

"Shopping for school supplies?" one of the men asked in a rough drawl, looming over the snow leopard lirren, the other two taking up flanking positions around him.

Ira remained stonily silent, silver eyes slitted with intent upon the three men while Harry hovered nervously behind him. The lirren didn't even flinch, only his tail was moving, the tip flicking this way and that at Harry's ankle. The men were at least a head and then some taller than Ira, and probably twice as wide, the snow leopard was not a large fifteen year old, he looked almost delicate in comparison. How the men knew they were attending Niflheim, Harry didn't know. If they had begun to harass students the same year that Ira attended, then this possibly wasn't the first time they'd seen him. Plus, it was an odd time of year to be collecting school supplies. If they were looking for Niflheim students, then undoubtedly they would be looking for pairs of teenagers heading towards certain shops, right? Harry bit his lip, watching the three carefully. He didn't know a lot about other countries, but these guys wore uniforms, that meant something. The question was, were they Russian military, Ministry, or some other organisation? What did their harassment of the students mean? Was Niflheim's independent sovereign state shooting them in the foot in regards to international incidents like this? Or –

"Bit young for that place, wouldn't you say?" the other mused, peering over Ira's shoulder to give Harry a thorough eyeballing. "Might get... hurt." Harry stiffened at the not so subtle threat, wishing now that he'd insisted on their getting a wand before anything else. He was handy with the Disarming spell, if nothing else it would surprise them.

"Let's not go that far. Saying things like that sounds like we're threatening them," the thus far silent one pointed out, his tone so entirely fake it actually

prompted a sting of annoyance in Harry who scowled at him.

"*Move along,*" Ira told them firmly, standing very *very* still.

The smiles immediately dropped, "*Want to repeat that? I think my ears need clearing out some,*" the first one, the ring leader, demanded in a dangerous growl that did very little to move the snow leopard lirren at all, his ears still pinned back, and his tail tip flicking languidly from side to side.

"*Move. Along,*" he repeated.

"*I see. I thought you Library Humpers were supposed to be smart,*" he mused, a wand suddenly appearing beneath Ira's throat, the tip digging into the vulnerable flesh just under his jaw. "*Do the smart thing, kid.*"

Ira's eyes narrowed. And the river rose up behind him.

The three men froze, their rapidly paling faces reflected in the liquid.

"*I will not repeat myself,*" the lirren stated coldly, a moment before the men scrambled backwards, and with a sharp jab forward with his arm, the river parted around the two of them and slammed the three men into the near-by wall, and froze solid as he clenched his fist.

Harry gaped in astonishment at the three men now cocooned in ice six feet up a brick wall.

Ira collected their shopping bags, and gently steered him away from the scene in silence.

"What just..." he wheezed.

"*I told you. I'm a Water Element student. Which means I don't need foci, or incantations, or anything really beyond my own magic and will to control water,*" he explained as he ushered the Gryffindor into a small out of the way shop. "*You'll learn how to do something similar. Your Prime element is the one you'll find the easiest, you'll eventually learn to control at minimum*

two others, but your Prime is the one you'll never need a foci for. Hell, not even hand gestures sometimes. Sorry if I scared you back there," he added, gently giving Harry's shoulder a small squeeze as he flagged down the attention of a store attendant.

Harry didn't even realise they were in a small opticians until that moment, he passed through his eye-test in a kind of daze as he was made to wear a horrible headpiece while a spider-centaur with six eyes and the glasses to match examined him, tapping said glasses with a small glass rod every now and again before pronouncing him done. All he had to do then was choose his frames, and the charms he'd like on them. Harry was still a little overwhelmed from earlier, so Ira ended up choosing the charms for him while he listed through the various glasses and eventually landed on a pair of frames almost the same as his old ones, only somewhat smaller.

When they left, Ira set their bags to one side and placed both hands on Harry's shoulders, looking him carefully in the eye, "*Harry, I'm sorry if what happened back there frightened you. But you can talk to me. Are you having second thoughts about the school, knowing what I just told you?*" he asked gently, eyes that had been slitted like needles earlier, wide and kind now.

Then his words registered and Harry rapidly shook his head, "No! No, I'm not having second – no. I was just... shocked. I'm still not sure I really understood what just happened. Why do they want the Niflheim Repository when they have their own?" he asked in frustrated confusion.

Ira shook his head, gently removing his hands from Harry's shoulders, "*No one knows. Not even the spies did, they were just following orders. There's a few theories but nothing concrete.*"

"Theories?" Harry prompted curiously as they collected his shopping and began to make their way forward again.

"Mm. The popular ones right now are that they found out something about their country's history and are freaking out about trying to hush it up, so they're trying to find all the records and destroy them before we find and

categorise them. It's popular, but doesn't hold much water. We know there are eight Repositories. We have a general idea of what countries they're in, but discounting ours, the only ones we have an exact location for is the Chinese one, which they built the Forbidden City on top of. So there is absolutely zero chance of getting in there. The Caribbean Repository, also known as New Atlantis. It's a city of mer and fish-folk, and rather militant at that. And the Canadian one. That's in Yellowstone National Park. Under it," the lirren added in tones of great pain. Harry looked at him in abject confusion. "Yellowstone National Park is in the bowl of an active volcano. A huge volcano. One that if it blew, has the potential to... pretty much destroy ninety percent of the northern hemisphere and plunge the southern one into a ten year winter with the chance of wiping out all plant and animal life," he explained as if it were just another Tuesday morning, only the higher than normal pitch to his voice betraying his nonchalant terror of such an incident.

*"The African Repository has been hidden by several tribes, we don't even know which tribes, or by what spells either. The Brazilian Repository still hasn't been found, and neither has the Australian one." Ira ran a hand through his hair, "So yeah, we know where about four of the other Repositories are, but the Russians have made pretty much no move for them. Which is somewhat understandable. No one wants to poke the Chinese mages in the wrong place, picking a fight with merfolk in their home territory is just stupid, and **no one is going to touch Yellowstone**. Which leaves only the Africans and us, and since no one knows how the Africans have hidden their Repository, that leaves us."*

The two discussed possibilities at length as they powered through the last few items on their list, Ira even taking the time to show him a good bookshop with quite an extensive fiction section (he guiltily admitted that he wanted to get the latest in his favourite series, he didn't mind a little detour did he? Harry shook his head no, and by the time Ira found the book he wanted, Harry had found several of his own as well).

Given how his last foci had been a wand, Ira took him into the wandshop where he went through a process remarkably similar to what Ollivander put

him through, only significantly shorter as the woman handling him seemed to be able to narrow him down remarkably quicker than the elderly wand maker. It took only fifteen minutes for her to narrow down his preferred length and wand core. All that remained was finding a matching wood.

Apparently holly was not it.

A close match, but not close enough for her tastes.

"Most wand makers'll give you the first wand that has a positive reaction to you," she explained as she rummaged another four wands out of her phoenix section for him to try, *"That's juvenile. Like marrying the first person you ever have a crush on. Choosing a life partner takes a little bit more than settling on the first person to like you back,"* she continued with a dismissive roll of her eyes as she gestured for him to try the other wands.

Holly was a good match. As was cypress, aspen, and beech.

He knew it was his the moment she placed it in his hands, and judging by the look on her face, she knew it too.

Twelve and a half inches, Cedar Wood, phoenix feather, supple.

They paid a small handful of Hack for his wand and that was pretty much the end of his day.

They collected his glasses, and a set of prescription goggles he could wear while travelling or flying, on their way back; passing by the three frozen Russians still plastered against the wall, now drawing a small crowd of people who were snorting and shaking their heads at them. They made a quick open-ended appointment at the veterinarian clinic for when Hedwig returned, that way Harry could get her checked out and the needed paperwork done so he could bring her to Niflheim, before they made their way back to the hostel. Ira took him via a different passageway, this one to the ferry tunnel that would basically drop them off at the pier just around the corner from the building.

The mural of Icarus was just as beautiful as the one of the Aesir and the Frost Giants, but not as detailed. The wings that Icarus wore though, they were threaded ever so finely with charter marks, done so finely that it just looked like decorative highlights to eyes that weren't used to hunting for a tiny flash of gold at two hundred miles an hour in the middle of the complete chaos of a Quidditch pitch.

He wondered what they meant...

"Harry, c'mon, we'll miss the boat!" Ira called down the gloomy tunnel, dragging the Gryffindor away from the beautiful mural once again.

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Jesse was waiting for him when they got back.

He gaped openly at Ira in a kind of stupefied fascination as the snow leopard lirren carefully handed everything over to his young charge, fussing over him more than a little bit before ruffling his hair, casting a half-hopeful half-worried look around the foyer before smiling wanly at him and leaving with a promise to be back the next day when Harry assured him that he didn't have to stick around.

"THAT'S yer mentor?!" Jesse blurted as soon as the lirren was gone.

Harry nodded, feeling his shoulders tense because he didn't want the American to start bad mouthing Ira who had been nothing but great towards him the whole day.

"Cooooool," the American breathed before practically launching himself at Harry in excitement, "How was yer day, what did ya 'ave for breakfast, can ya believe its actually a tradition for first years to get free food from their mentors?" he began rapid fire babbling as he scooped up the heavier bags and began to help Harry up the stairs of the hostel. The Gryffindor gave passing thought to snatching them back, if only so he could carry on in peace and quiet, but now that Jesse had found him, that was a doomed desire.

He gushed extensively about his mentor, an Asian girl a little older than him who was apparently some kind of Potions prodigy if the way she meticulously went through his entire apothecary set with a fine toothcomb to ensure it was up to her rigorous standards was any indication. Apparently she would be beginning her Alchemy classes this year as well, which then led Jesse off on a long detailed gushing rant about Alchemy and how their Potions professor had worked with Harry's own former headmaster to learn the twelve uses of dragon's blood over the course of twenty years and almost every dragon species known to roam the planet currently.

"Most of 'em are pretty useless though," he added, sounding torn between disappointed and amused, "Oven cleaner, fer one."

Harry paused as he was sorting through the pile of books he had scattered across his bed, and looked at him in disbelief.

Jesse nodded from his spot on the floor, back against Harry's bed, his grin a little twisted with his own disbelief, "Yah. I know."

Eventually in the prattle, Harry learned the name of Jesse's mentor, Setsuna Yukimoto. A Finnish girl studying potions at Niflheim, and, the very same Setsuna that was apparently friends with Ira if Jesse's gushing comments about her having already patented her own potion were any kind of confirmation. It looked like Harry had little chance of successfully avoiding Jesse once they reached Niflheim with that in mind, no doubt since their mentors were friends, they would somehow end up sharing more time together than just their classes. He tried not to wince at the future of his poor brain, he wondered how many general trivia facts Jesse could stuff between his ears before his brain just blue-screened like Dudley's computer the time he downloaded too much porn (why a ten year old was downloading so much Harry didn't want to know). He supposed he was being a little unfair to Jesse, who was just being friendly, but... he was just very... *full on*.

They went down for dinner, Harry wasn't really in the mood for hot food but he did spy something he had always wanted to try ever since he first

saw it in passing on the TV, sushi.

The hostel tried to provide a lot of multicultural food, so on top of the sushi, he could see various chinese noodle dishes, a russian styled hotpot, Jesse whooped *loudly* to see gumbo on the hotplate, assorted curries, and several fish and vegetable dishes as well. Tilly and Gully were apparently pulling out all the stops in the week leading up to the first day of term.

Stranger still when their year mates actually began to join them.

"Hi, you're that little kid that Nikos was talking to earlier!" the magpie girl from earlier greeted boisterously as she sat down next to him, Harry jolted a little, eyes wide as he nearly choked on his cucumber roll. *"I'm Ingrid. What's your name?"* she asked brightly, her plate largely occupied by cold sliced meats and a kind of nutty salad she had smothered in caesar dressing.

"Harry," he managed to choke out, reaching for his cup to take a drink. Some of the rice had gone uncomfortably close to the wrong tube, and now his neck felt a little tender.

"Harry? And you speak English! What the hell are you doing here then? Aren't you supposed to be in their stupid castle place?" she asked pointedly, her dark eyes beady and a little unpleasant.

Harry swallowed his drink, hard, feeling an unhappy twist in his stomach at her words.

"Hey, back off?" Jesse demanded shortly frowning at her from the otherside of the table. "Can't yah see yer makin' him uncomfortable?"

"Ooooh, so sorry, I didn't realise you were his mother," she cawed sarcastically, the black feathers in her hair flicking upright aggressively. *"Next time I'll wait for you to stop breas-*"

A heavy book dropped on top of her head, sending the magpie girl into a swearing fit, she whipped around to give the person an earful, only to wilt

immediately upon seeing the bald headed condor girl staring down at her with a cool facial expression.

"Mind your manners, chick," the much larger girl warned, her throaty voice possessing an almost hiss to it. *"They have reached the power level requirements, the same as you and I. Their right to be here is undisputed,"* she declared with great dignity as she rounded the table and sat beside Jesse, the black and white feathers that decorated the side of her head like ears flicking up and laying flat as she did so.

The magpie girl settled down sullenly, *"I was just asking. He's the one who - "*

"Had you taken that tone with me, I would have plucked your wings," the older girl declared blandly, staring at the younger with steady dark red eyes. The magpie girl, Ingrid, fell silent, and began to pick at her food without looking up from her plate.

Jesse frowned at her, before flashing a bright smile at the condor girl, "Thanks, I'm Jesse, this is Harry. Nice ta meet yah...?" he trailed off meaningfully as he beamed at her.

"...Viivi, Viivi Tuominen," she said after a long pause, staring him down for a while before nodding when he refused to back down, or stop smiling at her.

"So, do y'all know each other? Iffin yah don't mind me sayin', y'all have similar colourin'," Jesse asked curiously, digging back into his gumbo with gusto. Harry stayed quiet, dipping his cucumber rolls in a small dish of soy sauce before eating it as he listened to the conversation.

"No. We are tengu, but of a completely different species. The chick is a magpie, they are..." she trailed off thoughtfully, clearly trying to think of a polite way to word her comments.

Ingrid scoffed bitterly, *"She means we're rude, gossipy, like playing tricks on people, risk-takers, flashy, and thieves,"* she spat.

"Did I say that?" Viivi asked mildly.

"You were going to," Ingrid bit out sullenly.

"Then allow me to add: known for their intelligence, wide vocabulary, discerning eye for quality, and fierce defence of family, friends, and home." Ingrid shot upright, everything from her ear feathers to her wings ruffling upright in surprise as Viivi calmly cut and ate her rare steak without looking at her. *"And also, for establishing hierarchies amongst their social groups through often frowned on methods. As there the youngest here, I am afraid the chick decided to establish herself as your senior."* She nodded at Harry.

The former Gryffindor blinked at the older girl before looking to a faintly blushing Ingrid, "Um, you know, humans don't... we don't think like that?" he offered her hesitantly.

Jesse was rubbing his chin, "Actually, we kinda do, Harry," he corrected thoughtfully. "It's not as clean cut as that, an' a lot o' folk'd argue to the back teeth that they weren't so animalistic, no offence," he added with a glance to the girls. Ingrid grimaced, but Viivi flicked one of her massive wings with a shrug.

"None taken."

"Like, inna family group, ma and da are the ones in charge, yah? After that would be yer oldest sibling. For humans its often in age, an' then social standin'. Like... Harry, didn't yah say y'all was in Hogwarts? Y'all are well known fer yer non-human enrolment stances, same as most places back home. But, in yer class, yer tellin' me there was *no* peckin' order, at all? No one student who was considered tha best, that everyone listened ta, and one student who everyone thought was pathetic, lowest of the lot, an' made fun of?"

Immediately Harry thought of Neville, and felt horrible for doing so.

"How do humans establish their hierarchies?" Ingrid asked curiously.

Jesse shrugged, "Back home it was through violence. Hall fights, who could strike fastest an' nastiest. Who knew who, that guy had a cuz what went to prison, that guy's da is in a gang, her ma has an in with the faculty an' ain't afraid o'makin' yer life hard, stuff like that. What about Hogwarts?" the blond asked, peering over the table at Harry.

"I..." he trailed off, a little depressed because he had been so caught up in the whole Philosopher's Stone thing, then the Chamber of Secrets, that these sorts of social one-upmanship things had completely passed him by. He didn't want to take part, but he was somewhat sad that he had been paying so much attention to something else that he had been outside once again, paying attention to other things entirely, consumed by life outside his peer group. He... he was pretty sure he only knew the names of half the people in his year group to be honest. On the other hand...

"I didn't really get involved," he admitted, "Hogwarts was... is... very blood-prejudiced." Jesse started scowling then, actually setting his eating utensils down. Harry didn't notice as he toyed with his fork. "There are four houses, and we're broken into them based on personality traits and values on our first day. Gryffindor for the brave, Ravenclaw for the smart, Hufflepuff for the loyal, and Slytherin for the cunning. Gryffindor and Slytherin are the two extreme political factions, with the Slytherins espousing blood purity and often being in connection with dark magic and politics, and the Gryffindors opposite them. Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw sit in the middle with Hufflepuff leaning more towards Gryffindor, and Ravenclaw more towards Slytherin.

"Most of the students start figuring out whose in charge in their houses based on whose parents know who. Whose got the most money, the most pull, etc. Draco Malfoy, a Slytherin in my year, he had the most influence in his group because his father was on the board of governors. He bribed his way into the school quidditch team by buying them top of the line racing brooms. My bestfriend, Ron Weasley, by pureblood terms, had the least influence. His family are poor, he's one of seven children, the youngest boy, his father is a minor government employee. But... His whole family are comprised of powerful magic users, war heroes all. His oldest brother is a

successful curse breaker for Gringotts, his other brother works in Romania on a dragon reserve. By pureblood and Slytherin standards, the only people he's higher than are the muggleborn. But in Gryffindor, he's at the top of our class, erm, 'hierarchy' because of those very reasons. He's also really good at chess.

"At the same time, my other friend, Hermione, she's a muggleborn. According to the purebloods she shouldn't even exist, but she's the smartest witch in our school. They haven't invented a spell she hasn't figured out yet, she's top of all of our classes, she's a bit bossy, but she means well, but just because her parents don't have magic they call her horrible things," he explained, really getting into it as he scowled down at his food, gripping his fork tightly.

"There's... she's... Someone's been attacking muggleborn students," he explained having to actually put his fork down, not noticing as Jesse suddenly sat up straight, his eyebrows inching up his forehead, or the way Viivi went very very still. "There's a legend that the founder of the Slytherin house hated muggleborn, that he sealed a monster in the school that could only be controlled by his descendants, and that they would release it to cleanse the school of muggle filth. Fifty years ago it was opened, and a girl died. The groundskeeper was a student at the time and ended up expelled because he was keeping an unknown magical creature in a cupboard at the time. But, Hagrid wouldn't hurt a fly!" he burst unhappily, looking up at them earnestly. "He cries when he steps on his dog's tail! And – they arrested him without evidence, the same day they expelled me..." he explained softly, looking back down at his hands. "Someone opened the chamber on Halloween last year, Mister Filch's cat was petrified, so were a bunch of other people, including Nearly Headless Nick, our house ghost, and... and Hermione."

"Your friend was petrified, so you were expelled?" Ingrid demanded in abject confusion.

Harry nodded miserably, "The Minister assumed that because Slytherin was a Parselmouth, and his house is represented by snakes, that the monster

must be a serpent of some kind. I'm the only known Parselmouth at Hogwarts. So they expelled me."

Viivi made an ugly shrieking sound in shock, dropping her glass, her ear feathers flicking upright, even as Ingrid made a familiar chittering caw of shock herself.

"*You can't be serious!*" Ingrid burst.

"*The uproar that would -*" Viivi began herself, her wings half-unfurled and bristling furiously.

"*Is everything alright here?*" Mister Arif asked, swiftly making his way over to the small group of four that had managed to successfully grab the attention of everyone in the dining room.

"Yes, everything's fi-" Harry began desperately with wide eyes only to be interrupted by a loud noise from Ingrid as she pointed at him, staring at Mister Arif in horror.

"*That stupid Brit school expelled him for being a Parselmouth!*" she exclaimed, loudly, to the whole room.

Harry immediately wished the floor would swallow him whole as the whole room erupted in noise.

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And done. There you go Harry, making friends and influencing people already – and starting minor riots against your former educational institution as well.

10. Chapter 10

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

I do not own Harry Potter, Abhorsen, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, or Monster Hunter. I'm just playing with them.

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CHAPTER TEN

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Mister Arif's mouth opened noiselessly as he stared at first Ingrid, and then at Harry who was cringing down into his seat. It was hard to say what was running through his head from his facial expression, but a moment later his mouth clicked shut and he whirled around to the near enough *riot* occurring behind him and roared.

"*SIIIEEEENCE!*" and immediately everyone went quiet, their eyes practically popping from their skulls to hear the usually so jovial hostel

manager shout at them. Harry withdrew even further into himself, he should have kept his mouth shut. Had he learned nothing of how badly magicals looked at Parselmouths in this last year?

"This is not a subject to be gossiped about over the dinner table," Mister Arif bristled furiously, his usually kind eyes cold and narrow, *"Return to your meals. And do not speak of this to anyone outside the room until Mister Potter gives you permission, it is private information,"* he added darkly, shooting a look at an indignant bristling Ingrid. He then turned to Harry and managed to offer him a kind smile, *"Would you like to finish your meal in my office, Harry?"* he asked gently.

He nodded, *"Please."*

The chance to escape a very publicly humiliating situation? Yes. Yes he very much *would* like to eat in another room, far away from the inevitable gossip, looks, questions, etc. He quickly collected his tray and trotted after Mister Arif, keeping his head down and his shoulders hunched. The very Gryffindor part of him kept telling him to remain, to prove that it didn't mean anything to him, that he could absolutely handle all the stares and attention. Everything else in him told him to get out of there, and unfortunately, it was louder than the Gryffindor part of him, pointing out over and over again that *he was twelve, only twelve, and aside from himself there wasn't a person there under the age of thirteen.* Everyone present in the dining hall that evening was a Niflheim student, or a scholar looking for approval to study at the Repository. He was still a child in their eyes, it wasn't shameful to take an offered out.

Mister Arif led him through the same office he first came to, by-passing Julia who glanced up from her papers briefly, frowned, but ultimately returned to them without comment. She was joined by two other Niflheim elves in the room, and a rather hard faced goblin woman in a severe three-piece suit, all of them were sorting through paperwork. Mister Arif's office was at the back of the room, set a little out of the way. It was homey, and smelt thickly of incense and spices. The wall immediately to his left as he came in was lined with grey school-style filing cabinets, a window with

light grey blinds covered the window behind his oak desk and black leather computer chair, a black filing cabinet found a home in the far top left corner of the office, with low shelves next to it occupying the opposite wall to the door. In the corner directly opposite the door was a small sink with a kettle and a few shelves set above it with assorted teas, coffees, hot chocolates, and what Harry thought was a biscuit tin, and the wall to his right had a large black leather two seater couch that matched the computer chair behind his desk. Two pale grey plastic chairs he remembered from his old junior school were set in front of the desk, obviously for visitors. The hostel manager cracked a window to clear the room a little of the thick smell, and tugged on the back of his desk, extending it in front of Harry's eyes into a small table for him to eat at.

"Take a seat, Harry," Mister Arif told him gently in English.

Harry set his tray down and sat down on one of the plastic chairs while Mister Arif immediately moved to the black filing cabinet and unlocked it. He rummaged for a folder and tossed it onto his desk before closing and locking the cabinet, and then heading for the shelves on Harry's right where he began to tug folders off, flip through them, close them, and either put them back or levitate them onto his desk. A few books soon followed and the Sikh man sighed deeply as he finally dropped down into his computer chair.

"Is... everything alright, Mister Arif?" Harry asked quietly, fidgeting with his fork. "Am I... Do I have to leave now?"

Dark eyes blinked at him in surprise, "Leave?" he echoed in bafflement.

"Because I'm a Parselmouth," Harry mumbled, looking down at his plate and the torn apart tuna and pepper roll on his plate that he had been worrying to pieces with his fork while watching the Hostel manager collect all his papers and folders.

"Gods, no!" Mister Arif exclaimed, making Harry near enough boneless in relief. "Harry, I – no, clearly you – Harry, child, Parseltongue is a *gift*, you will absolutely *not* be thrown out of Niflheim or this hostel for being what

you are, I promise on my Faith," he swore earnestly, "I would sooner cut my beard than lie to you on this."

"Oh," Harry managed, "That's... good."

"Harry, being from England, you are probably unaware that Parseltongue is considered a *protected* magical ability within the M.E.N. and M.U.K.a.T., it's only within the I.C.W. that it is considered a frowned upon ability simply for the past actions of Parselmouths broken by Dark Magic. Parselmouth bloodlines are considered *national treasures* in some countries," he stressed seriously, shrewd eyes watching as the young man in front of him cringed into his seat defensively, looking more and more miserable. "You need not *tell* anyone, Harry, I am only informing you of this so that you know that you will be safe and protected almost *anywhere* else in the world, and need not fear the persecution you faced in England. How you handle your gift, and whom you inform of it is your business, and your *choice*. I will be having stern words with Miss Dahl regarding her behaviour."

Dahl? Oh, he must have meant Ingrid. Viivi's last name was Tuominen.

He nodded slowly, and Mister Arif gave him another bristling smile through his moustache before busying himself with his folders and his books. A little more comfortable, Harry was able to return to his sushi. He hadn't thought he would like raw fish, or at least *cold* fish. But it was nice. He wasn't too keen on the avocado rolls, or the spicy inside-out prawn one, but he liked the others, especially the rice. It was sticky and slightly sweet, he could quite honestly eat a bowl of it on its own. Maybe quick fry some steak, add a little cajun spice, dice it up, eat it along with the rice, that sounded pretty good actually. Harry sighed happily as he speared another salmon and rice nugget to eat. He watched with half an eye as Mister Arif folded a letter into an origami bird and threw it out of the window, almost immediately it flickered white and blue and transformed into a dove made of Charter Runes and flew off. He turned back to his books and opened another folder as Harry absently tracked the shimmering bird across the forebodingly dark sky.

"How did you find Helheim quarter, Harry, did you manage to get yourself a new focus?" Mister Arif asked casually as he glanced up from his books.

Harry nodded, "Yes, sir. A new wand. It was definitely different from Diagon Alley, but... Ira and I... some men stopped us," he began awkwardly.

Mister Arif sighed deeply, "Men in black uniforms, yes?" he asked, closing his eyes when Harry nodded. "Yes, I'm afraid I can't pronounce their division but they're something like your British UNSPEAKABLES. Due to Russia's communist stance, they were folded into the Moscow Military service. They have been trying with increasing desperation to gain access to the Repository, and dodging all investigation or questions regarding exactly why, or what has happened to their own." He scratched his beard with a heavy sigh, "If I were a betting man, I would say they have unleashed something they don't know how to contain, but are too proud to ask for assistance in dealing with it, so hope to learn how to do so themselves from our own Repository."

"Unleashed... Something?" Harry echoed slowly.

Mister Arif nodded, "Oh yes. The Repositories contain more than just books. Ancient magics, artefacts, spirits, creatures; why, we have an entire wing dedicated to Pre-Jurassic magical creatures all of whom live within their own fully functional environmental biomes. Entire greenhouses dedicated to butterflies, bees, various types of now extinct plants. Armouries of ancient enchanted weapons and armours, and prisons. Oh yes, many a malignant being and creature has been sealed within the Repository to be studied or simply to be imprisoned for whatever reason. That is why the Exploration Committee is so important within the school. The rules of the Library are absolute, Harry, and I would beg you to heed them. Otherwise I may never see you again."

Harry stared at him, waiting for the smile and the laugh, the 'just kidding, no need to look so scared'.

But it never came.

"I see," Harry managed to get out before he quickly stuffed another cucumber roll into his mouth. Just what the hell had been sealed in the Russian Repository that meant their magical *military* couldn't get inside?

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The last person Harry expected to see that evening was Ira, but the snow leopard Lirren burst through the front doors just as Mister Arif was escorting him up to his bedroom. The white haired youth looked as though he were in his bed clothes, and had just thrown a coat on before coming over.

"Harry! Arif said there had been an incident, are you alright?" the lirren demanded, crossing the entrance hall faster than Harry could process the fact that he was even *there*.

"I – you – what are you doing here?" he spluttered a little in alarm as the lirren touched his shoulders, his face, and then his hands started to glow, likely scanning him for injuries like he had done before in the magic quarter when he realised Harry's glasses were out of date.

"Arif sent me a charter bird, he said there had been an incident and you were upset. I came straight away, and you didn't answer my question: are you alright?" he repeated firmly, eyebrows knitting together in a stern frown.

Mister Arif chuckled at the accusing look of betrayed confusion Harry shot him.

"I do believe that is my queue to bow out. I leave Mister Potter in your capable claws, Ira." The lirren nodded distractedly, still frowning at Harry as the hostel manager saluted them briefly before bustling away with a far too cheerful whistle for a man that essentially just threw him under a bus. The twelve year old fumbled in horror, trying to think of something to say, preferably a lie because *oh god* he did not want to revisit what happened in that dining room, *thank you*.

"Harry..." the older teen demanded lowly before scruffing a hand through his hair, "Come on. Let's take this upstairs. We can talk in your room, or head to my old one if you'd rather," he offered tiredly.

"Your old room? You stayed here too?" Harry found himself asking curiously as slowly the two of them began their way up the stairs.

Ira nodded, "Yeah. Ages ago. I'm part of the Exploration Committee so I live at the school year-round now. A fair few students have permission to stay, but others prefer to go home during the Winter break," he explained, falling back a little to let Harry take the lead – he didn't notice, and took the lirren straight to his room on the third floor.

Jesse scrambled up from the floor in front of his door, "Harry! Are y'all a'ight?" he exclaimed in concern rushing over in a sloppy parody to the way Ira had earlier. "Ah'm so sorry, man! If ah knew she'da blurted tha' out in fron'a'everyone I'da silenced her!" he exclaimed, practically flapping around the two smaller boys.

Harry grimaced, if he knew, he'd have silenced her *himself*. Even if he didn't know the silencing charm yet.

"*You're a friend of Harry's?*" Ira asked doubtfully before nodding shortly at the rapid flopping nod that the blond gave, "*Then you can tell me what happened, since Harry himself seems rather closed lipped on the matter.* In," the lirren commanded shortly, gesturing both his charge and his American friend into the room.

Harry shuffled in and sat on the edge of his bed, wondering exactly why he felt as though he were about to receive a scolding from Mrs Weasley when it was just *Ira*, and he was only four years older than him! Jesse seemed to be just as cowed, and confused by that fact as he was actually the same age, sat beside him like a chastised little boy, the lirren stood in front of them in his open dark blue parka and pyjamas, his arms folded disapprovingly, and his tail tip flicking from side to side.

"Now, will one of you explain what happened before I start getting annoyed."

The Gryffindor half expected Jesse to vomit the whole story out without further need for prompting, it was certainly hard enough to shut him up at the best of times, but the blond boy kept his mouth shut, glancing at Harry nervously as if seeking approval before he said anything. So Harry very reluctantly explained, because clearly they weren't getting out of this, and he already knew from discussions in Helheim that Ira was currently learning empathy in his Mind Magics class, so lying would be useless. Thankfully the lirren seemed as confused by the uproar that kicked off as much as Harry had been, which prompted Jesse to burst out with an explanation on just *why* it was such a big deal that a British school had expelled someone for simply being a Parselmouth.

"But it wasn't, was it?" the snow leopard corrected blandly, flicking a hand out much to Jesse's confusion, *"He was expelled because he was the only person in the school supposedly capable of controlling the creature that was attacking students. Doing so without proof is bad enough, but it's hardly a crime against nature, nor an act of terrorism. What's the big deal? He could always continue his education at a different school."*

"But he can't!" Jesse burst in frustration. "The ICW nations all wrote up a unanimous law that if a student *begins* their magical education at a certain institution, they can *only* continue it at that institution! If you're expelled, no other school within an ICW nation can invite you to learn with them by law! They essentially exiled him over this! Snapped his wand and everything!"

Ira looked sharply over at Harry who stared down at his feet unhappily, "I didn't know about the Law but... the Minister did snap my wand," he mumbled.

The lirren dragged a hand through his hair, *"Yes, that's terrible and awful and horrible. But I still don't understand why the other countries are going to make such a big deal out of it when the British only recently made the*

murder of lycanthropes illegal. There are a hundred things far more tragic and important to protest about their government than the expulsion of one child, no offence," he added looking apologetically to Harry who shook his head with a wry smile. No, no, he was fully on the same side as Ira at this moment in time. He didn't get what the whole fuss was and would be quite happy if they would please just – Stop.

Jesse made an abject noise of frustration, scrubbing both hands through his hair. "It – it's like kicking the goddamn Pope out of – no worse, kicking an *Angel* out of a church because someone set fire to a Pew and he was the only one with a flaming sword!" he tried to explain.

Ira stared.

He still didn't get it.

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No matter how Jesse tried to explain it, Harry's mentor still didn't understand just why it was so significant that Harry had been expelled for being a Parselmouth, and while *some* of the explanations hammered home just how the ability was viewed in other countries for Harry, he too still didn't *quite* get why it was so bloody important. In the end, the American stormed back to his room, loudly ranting about how he would get his cousin Chase to send him his book on Parselmouths so he could teach them a thing *properly*.

Ira looked quite relieved to see the blond leave as he took his parka off, and knelt in front of Harry.

"Seriously, are you alright? I didn't want to push you in front of your friend, but you know you can talk to me Harry. I'm your mentor, I want to be here for you, and make sure you're okay," the snow leopard explained gently, blinking slowly up at him as his tail curled around his ankles.

The twelve year old nodded, "I'm sure." He wrinkled his nose at the expectant look on the sixteen year old's face before sighing and slumping a

little, he wanted to talk about *feelings* not just physicality. And Harry didn't have much of a chance of lying about it like he would have done before. Ira would be able to tell. "I just... don't like attention," he managed to admit, staring down at his fingers as he picked at a loose thread on his favourite Weasley sweater. "At the Dursleys, attention was bad, Uncle Vernon didn't like people paying attention to me, Aunt Petunia didn't like people knowing her house wasn't perfect, didn't want people knowing about me. At Hogwarts... Everyone knew who I was, I never really... I wanted a clean slate. The Dursleys spent years making sure everyone knew I was a disrespectful brat, a little yob. At Hogwarts, they expected someone more – someone – just *more* than me. I never really got a chance to... Everyone was always watching, paying attention, judging..."

He shrugged his shoulders uncomfortably, "I can deal with it, it's not a big deal, I just don't – *like* it. If you know what I mean."

A hand reached over and patted his fiddling fingers, "*I do. Maybe not to such great degrees, but I do.*"

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Ira stayed the night, Harry tried to protest, but the lirren insisted and stole some bedding from an empty room, camping out on Harry's floor, blithely stating that the ice flows around the school were too dangerous to try crossing in the dark and he had been forced to call in a favour from a friend in order to fly out of the wards before he could portkey to Helheim and run over. The Gryffindor had been horrifically embarrassed and guilty over the big fuss he had caused, only for Ira to laugh and *hug him*.

Harry didn't like being touched. Which was why the fact that he *didn't mind* was such a big deal.

Ira hugged him tightly, and it wasn't like Mrs Weasley's embraces that felt a little like she was trying to squeeze as much love as she could into him in the short amount of time she managed to get him into her arms. It felt like a support. Ira was still laughing, and Harry could feel it shaking him a little,

and hear the faint rasp in his voice with his ear so close to the sixteen year old's neck.

The lirren drew back and ruffled his hair, still grinning, "*You're my kid. I'm supposed to fuss,*" he declared smugly, "*But don't worry. I'll definitely be teasing you about this many years down the line.*"

That did not help things, but Harry dropped the matter like the a dungbomb and went to bed. Thankfully Ira did not snore, in fact, he was so quiet that Harry actually forgot he was even there, and when he woke up the next morning actually *stepped* on him. The resulting yowl, scream, and various crashes and swearing was enough to wake almost everyone on their floor, and the walk of shame down to the dining room for breakfast was particularly mortifying with everyone staring and whispering. (Harry could only be thankful he stepped on Ira's *hand* and not his *tail*.)

Ira very carefully avoided the living room where the two snow leopard twins were playing with their blocks again.

People stared as they got trays and breakfast, Harry steadily hunching deeper and deeper into his cloak while Ira seemed to ignore them with a cat-like disdain that he really envied right now.

"*Mister Potter?*" someone prompted from behind them, Harry closed his eyes for a moment, dearly wishing he had Ron and Hermione with him to act as a buffer right then. None the less, he turned to face the stranger, an Asian scholar in heavily embroidered robes. The man, on the upper-end of middle aged, bowed to him before nodding to Ira and then turning his attention back to the Gryffindor, "*Please know that should you ever have need of sanctuary, China will welcome you with open arms. The Empress herself will open her doors to ensure your safety,*" he promised solemnly, "*Divine Wind protect you, Mister Potter,*" he intoned before bowing and retreating.

Harry opened his mouth to say something but he was already gone, and he honestly had no idea what to say in the slightest.

"*Huh,*" Ira said, just as bewildered before shrugging a shoulder, "*Come on, let's grab a seat.*"

Silently Harry quickly took the lead and hurried to the most secluded corner of the dining room he could see, putting his back to the wall so he could see anyone coming, and see who would be staring at him the most. People wouldn't stare if they thought they would be caught in the act – and Harry got antsy with his back to a crowded room. It wasn't so bad at Hogwarts because Hufflepuff had the table behind Gryffindor, and they weren't exactly the back-stabby type.

Ira demolished his pastries in record time, and chugged his juice with relish as Harry picked his porridge morosely. "*Is there anything you want to do today, since I'm down here anyway?*" the lirren asked, semi-successfully derailing Harry from his nervous brooding.

"Apart from Hedwig's check ups, there's nothing really *to* do, I don't even have any books to study," Harry admitted softly.

The sixteen year old hummed, "*You got a new wand, it might be an idea to give it a bit of a test drive. See how it responds to you before you get into lessons?*" he suggested running a finger across the rim of his glass, making it ring pleasantly.

"I thought I wasn't allowed to do magic outside of school?"

Ira shook his head with a smile, "*Maybe in England, over here, you just have to make sure no Ignored spot you doing it. There's a basement room for spell casting if you want to give it a go.*"

The chance, the *allowance* to use his magic outside of school, outside of lessons, made his blood sing for the first time in a long time. Harry felt excitement flush through him, and the first *real* grin he'd worn since he was expelled from Hogwarts spread across his face.

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Slightly shorter chapter than usual as I wanted to get it out for this note specifically:

Some people haven't heard yet, so I'll be plain, I'm trying a new method of writing which I hope will see me actually completing fics. Unfortunately, that does mean I am focusing *all* of my attention on just the one. Meaning, I'm not writing updates for any stories save that specific one – which is 'Against My Nature' in this case.

It's been working so far. I mean, twenty eight chapters written since I started at the beginning of the year – and that's with a lot of bullshit going on in my personal life at the same time. So it's working so far.

But yes, I thought I would knock this out quickly to reassure you all that **Niflheim has not been abandoned. I'm just focusing all of my attention on Against My Nature in order to complete it before focusing on another fic and doing the same. Chances are, my new writing method will actually see me completing fics for once.**

So please bare with me. I keep a regularly updated list of Abandoned fics on my profile, if there's a dead fic with no hope of revival – I'll have it listed there. Promise.

11. Chapter 11

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

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The basement training room was a lot further down than Harry had been expecting when Ira took them to one of the backrooms behind the kitchen and down a spiral staircase. It was actually kind of eerie as they walked, the red brick and black mortar tube was interspaced here and there with dome shaped lights that took Harry a while to notice were magical now where as further up they had been electrical. The steps themselves were a sturdy old oak wood, and wide enough for three people to stand side by side as they made their way down.

The room they stepped out into looked like something out of an old fashioned American Boxing film, brick walls of an indeterminate grotty greenish, grey, yellow colour that was, at first, fairly straight but then arched into a dome across the ceiling. The walls were lined with shelves featuring protective padding, boxing gloves, even foam and latex weaponry, exercise balls, towards the back of the room there was a red and blue cord-framed boxing ring, and hanging from the ceiling next to it were a number of punching bags, and free weights against the wall. The room itself was a long rectangle, and rather cold with the brick walls and dark hard-wood floors. It was also completely deserted.

"Have you had any formal instruction on self defence?" Ira asked as he nudged his shoes off next to a bench.

Harry wrinkled his nose, "Um, there was a Duelling Club earlier this year," he admitted slowly.

The lirren grinned, *"Really? Britain is known for having ridiculously powerful magic users, your Battle Magics are supposedly top tier. How long were you there for?"* he asked enthusiastically.

The Gryffindor cringed in remembrance, "Barely an hour. It was shut down immediately."

"*Huh, why?*" the older boy asked, head tilting.

"Professor Lockhart was a fraud who didn't know what he was doing, Professor Snape hated me, and I accidentally revealed I was a Parselmouth to everyone when Snape got Malfoy to set a snake on one of the Hufflepuff students," he quickly blurted out, rolling his shoulders awkwardly.

"Lockhart? As in, Gilderoy Lockhart?"

Harry nodded.

The lirren looked *livid*, *"Hogwarts actually hired that criminal?"* he demanded.

"Criminal?" Harry echoed, "I get he's useless and kinda fruity, but I don't think stupidity is a crime," he pointed out with a short nervous laugh.

Ira did not echo it, he had his arms folded and was scowling down at his barefeet, *"He's a criminal because he's wanted in at least three countries for illegal use of memory charms on both magicals and ignored. He's the worst scum,"* the lirren growled, the sound rumbling from his chest and reminding Harry that he was, in fact, a very deadly predator – or at least part of one. The twelve year old swallowed nervously as the lirren's large tail lashed from side to side, knocking his boots over without noticing. *"At least six confirmed rapes, three of which being witches under the age of sixteen,"* Harry blanched in horror, *"And an unconfirmed number of illegal memory charms on magical officials, former law enforcement, former accidental magic reversal, destruction of dangerous beasts, Gringotts contractors; you name it, he's probably slipped them a truth potion, stolen their memories, and then erased their minds."*

He started pacing, marching to the centre of the room, *"I know the British think their shit don't stink, but this is ridiculous. Allowing a suspected child rapist into a Frost Damned school!"* he ranted furiously, ears folded back as his hair puffed up along with his tail, almost doubling in size as it swung violently from side to side. He huffed out a harsh breath, *"I'll dig out his arrest warrant, forward it along to your school with a strongly worded letter, and another one to your Law Enforcement Department. Actually, perhaps it would be better to just inform our own Law Keepers...."* he mused thoughtfully, slowly relaxing as he thought it over, tail slowing its angry lashing to a slow swing of irritation.

He shook his head, *"Later. Either way, we're not here to rehash my breathtaking anger management issues regarding that waste of oxygen. Let's see how your new wand casts,"* he declared with a fanged grin.

Deeply unsettled, he pulled his wand out, gripping the cherry wood tightly. God, he had spent how many detentions with Lockhart, how many of those hours had blurred together, how much of it did he really remember? What was – had he done something to Harry, or any of his classmates? Thank

Goodness Hermione had never been alone with him. Only now... Now Hermione was alone, and Ron couldn't be at her bedside all the time, he had to go to classes! Harry swallowed hard, feeling something sicky, and hot at the bottom of his throat, like a hard knot, or lump between his collarbones.

"*Harry*," Ira's hands landed on his shoulders, and the Gryffindor nearly kicked him in surprise, "*I'll send a Charter Bird to Hogwarts tonight, alright? Calm down, okay?*" he soothed, meeting the twelve year old's eyes firmly.

Harry nodded shakily, "I – Hermione, my bestfriend, she – she really admires him, and she's Petrified right now, and Ron can't be there all the time," he blurted. He wanted to go back, he *needed* to go back, make sure she was alright!

Ira blew into his face, making him flinch back and jerk, blinking up at him in shock, "*Calm. What kind of Petrification?*" he asked, rubbing his hands up and down Harry's upperarms.

"We – there's more than one kind?" Harry asked in bewilderment.

The lirren nodded, "*Plenty. I'm going to assume she was hit with a Magical form of it. Spell?*"

"No one knows. No one's been able to catch the one doing it. She isn't the only one," he explained quietly, looking down as he fiddled with his wand.

"*I'll talk to my boyfriend, he's one of the best we have at Talismen. I'm sure he can make enough Imp Fangs for them all, and if they aren't strong enough then a Soul Benediction will definitely work,*" Ira assured him with a kind smile as Harry nodded slowly. The lirren ruffled his hair, "*I've never heard of a abnormality not being cured by a Soul Benediction, at least abnormalities of the body that don't instantly kill.*"

"If it's so good, why haven't I heard of it before?" Harry asked both hopeful and sceptical.

Ira chuckled and ruffled his hair, "Because they're hellishly difficult to make, and disposable Talismen rarely last long in the hands of people who know what their function is. When people don't, they're usually sold on to antique shops or just gotten rid of as useless tat and the like. They tend to look rather innocuous to the unaware. Soul Benedictions look like a rather pretty wood carving, a medallion with the image of the nymph Daphne. Pretty, but ultimately nothing special. Orion is the only one outside the final year Talismen students that can make them, but I'm pretty sure Teacher Willow wants to make him her next Apprentice, so it isn't surprising that he can as a Fourth year."

Harry sighed, fingering the handle of his wand before shooting his mentor a sly smirk, "Boyfriend, huh?" he asked lightly, "When were you going to tell me about that?"

Ira blushed, "I didn't want to scare you off. Non-M.E.N. nations tend to have rather... stern views on same sex partnerships."

The Gryffindor shook his head, "England is fine. Magically speaking. Muggles not so much. But yeah, my friends' older brothers were in a three-way relationship with our Quidditch Captain for a while, and no one batted an eye. They broke it off so Oliver could focus on his Quidditch career, and the twins could start studying properly for their OWLs, but yeah. Same sex is fine. Just don't make out in front of me," he added with a grimace, having seen Fred pounce on Oliver once in the shower room was too much for his tastes.

The lirren laughed and ruffled his hair, "I'll bare it in mind. Now, I thought we were taking your wand for a test-drive?"

It... was a lot more fun than he thought it would be, showing Ira all his spells – not that there were many as he was only a Second Year. But the lirren had never seen Charms, or Transfiguration before, and was both excited and fascinated by the possibilities in both branches of magic, charms moreso than Transfiguration. Whether it was because lirren were developed as weapons, or because he was a Librarian and thus used to

having to think of combat applications of his spells, but Ira was also very good at pointing out ways that those spells could be used if overpowered or underpowered at certain points.

They wrestled a little, play fighting, something that Harry had never done and found himself losing very quickly – though he was a lot harder to pin down than the snow leopard lirren anticipated as he continued to squirm and wriggle and eel himself out of the older boy's grasp. The two of them running around the room laughing and shouting as they eventually devolved into flicking prank spells at one another – Harry still couldn't believe how unfair it was that the lirren used his own sweat to trip him up, and then *froze* it in his armpits to make him shriek! That was *cheating!*

Eventually they calmed down and went to go and get washed up, the snow leopard lirren admitting that he had better get back to the school before Orion tore the place apart looking for him, annoying bastard. Before he went though, he showed Harry how to make a Charter Bird, or rather... how *impossible* it was for him to make a Charter Bird right now.

Humming carefully, his fingers wove glowing runes into a skeleton that his voice filled with golden marks, falling from his lips like embers as he spoke them, forming them up and around the letter that Harry had written out earlier to Professor McGonagall about what he'd learned of Lockhart's actions. There was no way Harry could create one of those yet. He didn't know any of the runes he used, how to call them, or even what Charter Magic was despite apparently having a Mark and access to the spell-craft. It looked complicated, and difficult.

"*Done,*" the lirren announced with a grin as he dropped his hands, leaving a bright ghostly glowing bird, almost the same as the one that delivered his acceptance letter to move silently in front of them. This one had shorter legs, and a longer tail than the one that showed up last time, and its feathers had brighter concentrations of marks here and there that looked almost like markings strangely enough. "*Every bird will look a little different,*" Ira explained, probably feeling his curiosity as he eyed them, "*because everyone lays the marks a little differently from each other. There's no*

wholly right and wholly wrong way of doing Charter Magic, there is of course premade formulas, but everyone personalises their magic even without realising. Everything that we do in our lives will influence every piece of magic we do. There's no spell that is ever the same as the one that came before it."

Harry made a sound of realisation as the Charter Bird bobbed itself up and down and then hopped towards the open window, taking wing as it leapt free and vanished in silence.

"I'll come by tomorrow and teach you properly how to make one," the lirren promised as he got to his feet, *"I did say I would. But I need to pick up a few books and talk to Teacher Vasterstrom about getting you started."*

"Okay," Harry agreed and grunted a little in surprise when he was dragged into a hug, his eyes widening a little before the lirren pulled back and ruffled his hair.

"Stay out of trouble, you mischief maker," he teased with a fanged grin as the young Gryffindor protested loudly, grinning back.

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As much as Harry would have loved to remain hiding in his room, away from everyone who had just found out he was a Parselmouth, he didn't get a chance to when Jesse practically plastered himself to his bedroom door, gushing about how he, Viivi, and Ingrid were going to Helheim and he had to come with them because it was always more fun to go shopping with friends and c'moooooon!

In the end, he let them drag him out.

Between the four of them, they were able to navigate themselves onto the ferry that would take them into the Helheim Quarter without issue, though Viivi did have to drag Jesse back onto the ferry when they got into the tunnels when he tried to stick his head in the river to say hi to a pretty mermaid he spotted.

They wondered around the Helheim district, looking at everything on offer and generally acting like teenagers as they found a few shops with games and the like in them. Harry already had a chess set, but the moving figurines were pretty cool. Viivi explained that she collected them as drawing references, she quite liked doing comic art and found that these animated statuettes were fantastic for her work. She bought several of the little models and gave him one, an albino occamy the size of his finger. The little winged snake curled up into a ball in his hand, white feathers shimmering like mother of pearl as it stretched out its tiny little wings.

Ingrid found a jewellery shop and spent a good twenty minutes plastered to the window gushing about metal quality and crystals as she hungrily watched all the glittery things catching the light.

And Jesse...

Jesse bought a cat.

A tiny puffball of fur that he called... 'Homicidal Muffin Queen'. Muffin for short.

Harry didn't even know *what* breed of cat it was until they took the purring hand-sized thing to the veterinary clinic where they found out she was just a kitten, and something called a Norwegian Forest Cat. An intelligent breed of feline that grew to the size of a small dog and was known to chase foxes if they felt the need to.

"They're a more magical breed than many would consider given their popularity with the ignored population," the clinic nurse explained as she used a book, much like Madam Alice, to cast her spells on the purring ball of fluff. *"She's in good health, and all of her vaccinations are up to date. Bring her in next year for her next lot, and that should be that for your little lady, unless you'd like her spayed. In which case, again, wait until next year."*

Muffin was fairly well behaved, perfectly content to sit in Jesse's coat pocket and sleep, the four of them continued with their little exploration as

they bought a few things here and there and generally got to know the area. Harry saw some more men in uniform in the distance and was quick to drag the others away and to a safer place, which prompted some uncomfortable explanations about just why.

"That explains why Setsu was so paranoid," Jesse realised, "She kept shushing me whenever I said 'Niflheim'. At the time I thought she just didn't like me talking so much."

Viivi clucked unhappily, *"It makes little sense though for them to be violent about it. Surely if they did not resort to such measures they would have been more successful in gaining access to Niflheim. The only reason they were refused the first time was because they had their own. If they explained why they needed access instead of trying to force the issue, I'm sure the Headmistress would have allowed them."*

Harry nodded, "Probably. But what if it was to destroy information? I don't think she'd be okay with that," he pointed out seriously.

"They could be trying to steal stuff?" Ingrid suggested her feathers flicking upwards, *"The Repository doesn't just have books. It has weapons, jewels, armour, enchanted objects, even living creatures. Maybe they're trying to steal Rasputin's ballsack or something,"* she suggested with a grimace, and then squawked as Viivi clipped her over the back of the head with one of her wings

"Don't be vulgar," the vulture tengu scolded with a delicate wrinkle of her nose.

"But she has a point," Harry defended with an uncomfortable roll of his shoulders, "You both do. But the problem is, no one knows what happened to the *original* Russian Repository, or why they're so desperate to get to Niflheim's. If we did, we might be able to figure out what they want with the other one, because they're not bothering anyone else with a Repository, though that could be because they're scared to."

"What do you mean?" Jesse asked curiously.

"One is in Atlantis, there's another one *under* Yellowstone, the Forbidden City in China has one, and there are three others which no one can find. One in Australia, one in Africa, and one in Brazil somewhere. The Russians haven't tried for *any* of them according to Ira," Harry explained quietly as the group solemnly began to make their way back to the ferry-port, unanimously deciding their day out was done with.

While they discussed the issue, increasingly wild theories about what the Russians could be after, whether it even was the Russians or perhaps it was someone else *pretending* to be Russian just so the blame would be pinned on them, Harry found the Icarus mural again and began to copy down all the runes he saw. They had an hour before the ferry arrived anyway.

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Sorry guys, this was meant to be longer, but my painkillers are super fucking with me right now. I need to get some sleep. Merry Christmas.

As part of your Pressies this holiday, I have updated the following fics:

Niflheim Academy
Against My Nature
Echoes of Green
Storming Skies
Protectors
Playing with Fire
Hand You're Dealt

12. Chapter 12

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

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CHAPTER TWELVE

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As it turned out, Harry did not have a single musical bone in his body. After half a day of practising with the carved flute Hagrid gave him last year, he gave up to the tune of Ira patting him on the shoulder and suggesting they try a different instrument tomorrow in delicate tones that left little to the imagination of how little he thought it would help. This meant he hadn't a hope in hell of performing even the most basic runic sequences of Charter Magic as the art was *heavily* intertwined with music for reasons Harry

didn't yet know. He couldn't even whistle them because he had never learnt, nor been taught how.

"We can leave the practical applications until after you've sat a few music lessons," Ira suggested as he sipped his bottle of water, the two of them sprawled out on the floor of Harry's hostel room. Harry sighed and packed the flute away, a little shamefully. He had managed to put Fluffy to sleep with it last year and thought that meant he wasn't too bad of a player, he should have realised that a dog, even a magical one with three heads, was not the best barometer for figuring that out. *"Here. You can memorise a few of these until then, it'll definitely help you cast if you can picture the runes clearly in your head,"* the Lirren continued as he dug into his bag and handed over a thick leather bound tome.

A runic dictionary.

Harry eyed it a moment, and then Ira, who thankfully didn't notice his scepticism as he was too busy swearing at the time. *"I should head back. Orion's going to put my tail in a vice if I'm out past curfew again,"* he complained irritably as he gathered his things and climbed to his feet.

Alarm stung Harry a little, "But, he's your boyfriend, right? He wouldn't really put your tail in a vice just for being late, would he?" he asked worriedly.

Ira blinked wide silvery white eyes at him before he smiled, *"It's just a saying, Harry. I promise. Orion would never hurt me on purpose outside of a spar. He's the dormitory monitor so he'll assign me a detention, boyfriend or not, if I'm out late past curfew."* The Lirren reached over and ruffled his hair, *"And if he ever tries to raise his hand to me, then I can promise you, I would rip it off and beat him with the soggy end. After Esme was finished with him. If there was anything left of him after Esme finished with him, that is,"* he added with a mirthful huff.

"...Alright," Harry allowed slowly, nodding. "Travel safe, and I hope you get there in time."

"*Me too. Detention before the first day of term, that'll be embarrassing. Night night Harry,*" the sixteen year old bade before seeing himself out. Leaving Harry alone in his cold dormitory room, with his flute that he was useless at playing, Hedwig's empty perch, and a dictionary of runes he didn't particularly feel like reading.

It took a while, but eventually Harry caved and opened up the dictionary. It... wasn't exactly the most *thrilling* of stuff, if it hadn't been for both his notes of the Icarus mural and his obsession with the beautiful wings depicted upon it, and his new adventure book which featured Charter Runes extensively as both riddles and code, he probably wouldn't have touched the book until the start of his actual lessons.

Ingrid laughed loudly and mockingly in the middle of the dining hall when she heard about his failure in the musical arts, earning herself another cuff upside the head from Viivi's wing. Then the two girls dragged him down to the basement duelling room to give him singing lessons.

Both of them were *incredible* singers. Viivi's throaty alto was powerful, and she had the lung capacity to hold her notes for minutes at a time. In contrast, it was hard to say where Ingrid fell on the tonal scale as she had an absolutely huge range, and was able to slide up and down it as far and as fast as she pleased, mid-word. Apparently most Tengu were quite skilled at singing. Harry was almost too embarrassed to open his mouth around them – at least until Jesse opened his mouth and began to *loudly* and *badly* sing 'Holding Out for a Hero' in an offkey mess, making both girls laugh and throw their socks at him as he air guitarred across the room.

He felt significantly less embarrassed after that, which, mission accomplished he guessed as he caught sight of Ingrid and Jesse discreetly high-fiving behind his back. But, as it turned out, he wasn't actually a bad singer. Nothing great, but pretty good none the less.

Barely half a week later, Ira showed up looking very pleased with himself, holding a copy of the Daily Prophet declaring Gilderoy Lockhart's arrest, and a few hours later Hedwig returned from her delivery to Hogwarts with

Ron's reply. It had clearly been written and sent before Lockhart's arrest as he mentioned how he was finding it hard to fight the rising urge to curse him down a flight of stairs for poncing around saying that he knew Harry had been rotten all along, hence why he tried to keep such a close eye on him, and guide him away from bad influences. What a load of bollocks. Hermione was still Petrified, Hagrid was still in Azkaban, Ginny was absolutely heartbroken by his expulsion but seemed to perk up when he told her about being accepted into a different school. There had been no attacks since he left, which was both a good thing and a bad one because everyone was now fairly certain that Harry really *had* been the one responsible – meaning Ron's days were pretty busy what with all the detentions he got as a result of punching them all.

Malfoy was a little beside himself, unsure of what stance to take. Gleeful one moment that Harry had been expelled, confused that he was apparently the Heir of Slytherin, him, the Gryffindor Golden Boy Goodie Two Shoes, and outraged that the Ministry would dare to expel the heir of such a venerable Pureblood family from their own property – as surely Hogwarts belonged to the Slytherin line as the only remaining pureblood family with ties to the founders (keyword being *Pureblood*). He was absolutely dizzy from the internal conflict.

'It's just not the same without you. It's pretty lonely actually. Neville's trying to help but he just doesn't get me the way you did. And Hermione's still in the hospital wing, and I might have decked Seamus.' Harry could feel his heart breaking a little, and mentally bowed to send a nice thank you letter and a whole box of Chocolate Frogs to Neville.

He missed Hogwarts. It was like a vice on his lungs sometimes, stealing his breath away when he woke up and stared at his white ceiling, feeling the bitter chill of the Norwegian Spring on his face, instead of the dull red of his bed-hangings and the warmth of Gryffindor Tower, the distant sound of Ron snoring to one side of him instead of the distant screaming of seagulls, and people shouting in a language he didn't yet understand.

"Have you talked to Orion about the talismen?" he found himself asking his mentor finishing his return letter to Ron, and another one to Neville, as the lirren gleefully reread the paper detailing that Gilderoy Lockhart was being sent to an M.E.N. Sponsored correctional facility in an undisclosed location for the next twenty to thirty years (his sentence was for forty years, but with good behaviour it could be halved, *very good behaviour*).

The lirren paused, "*I've spoken to him, yes,*" he admitted with a strange look on his face. Harry waited for any further information, but Ira just worked his jaw, mouth partially open as he tried to think of something to say, or how to politely word what he was *going* to say. "*It'll probably take a while,*" he warned.

Translation: Orion probably didn't want to make them.

Harry turned back to his letter to Ron, "Oh. Okay," he said softly, and then tore the last paragraph off his sheet of parchment that mentioned about the disposable talismen that could awaken Hermione and the others ahead of the mandrakes.

The next day when Ira showed up, he was a good hour later than they'd originally agreed, and showed up looking distinctly irritated and harassed, his ears laid flat and his tail flicking aggressively from side to side.

"Are you alright?" Harry found himself asking, wrapped up warm in his new thermals, sweatshirt, and jeans, Hedwig perched on his shoulder fussing with his hair.

Ira wrinkled his nose, "*I'm fine. Orion's just being an ass,*" he dismissed with a flick of a hand before he plastered a slightly forced smile on, "*And who is this lovely lady?*" he deflected as he peered over at the snowy owl.

Harry happily let himself be distracted, "This is Hedwig," he explained, reaching up to stroke her breast as she turned her head to eye him sceptically. "Hedwig, this is Ira, he's going to take care of me at school," he told her.

"Nice to meet you, Beautiful," the Lirren greeted sweetly, his voice gentling considerably.

Hedwig remained perfectly still before she shrilled quietly and returned to preening Harry's wild hair into what she must have thought was a semblance of order – but for a human, it didn't make much of a difference, but either way, Harry let her have her way.

Ira chuckled, *"All we need to do now is dip dye your hair white, and we'd be a matching set,"* he teased, gesturing to himself and Hedwig, both of whom were white with black spots.

Harry snorted, "Pretty sure that's against the uniform code," he pointed out with a grin.

"In Hogwarts maybe. As long as it doesn't interfere with yours, or anyone else's studies, pretty much anything goes within the confines of the law," he explained as he withdrew an ivory and mother of pearl wand from a holster at his hip. Harry had never seen a wand made of animal parts before, it was a beautiful thing, fifteen inches long, a little thicker than his own wand, with delicately etched in patterns of what he first thought were vines, but actually looked more like water swirls. The lirren paused for a moment, thinking of something, before he very deliberately flicked it into a pattern over Hedwig, eyed his handy work, and nodded happily.

"Shall we go? I've laid one of your Notice Me Not charms on her, so the Ignored shouldn't pay her any attention. Useful things charms, I'm honestly surprised no one in Niflheim's heard of them before," the snow leopard mused as he tucked his wand away again under his coat.

Harry nodded slowly, feeling a weird twist in his stomach.

He had been studying charms for two years. The Notice Me Not was OWL level according to Hermione. Harry hadn't a hope in hell of performing the charm, even with two years study.

Ira hadn't even *heard* of Charms until a week ago when he met Harry, and he not only tracked down information on the discipline himself, but also learned, practised, and executed an OWL level spell. In a week. Like it was no big thing. Yes, he might have been four years older than Harry, and yes, Harry might have only been *twelve*, **but** – it was still a little... disheartening? Belittling? ...Shaming?

He followed Ira down to the magic quarter, Hedwig watching the goings on around her with interest as they stepped into the strangely dim underground catacombs and waterways, heading to the cheerful brightly lid clinic at a small circular plaza with cobblestones and hanging baskets of flowers from the streetlights. It took until they were at the front desk, and a confused look from the technician before Ira remembered to cancel the charm on the snowy owl who ruffled herself in mild annoyance, glad to be rid of the unpleasant feeling on her feathers.

The checks themselves were fine. Hedwig was registered as a magically bred post-owl, and Harry's primary familiar surprisingly. She had formed a magical bond with him and was absorbing some of his magic to bolster herself, and sooth him as well.

"It's beginning to overflow a little, but you're attending Niflheim now, right?" the cheerful witch manning the clinic asked as she tweaked the snowy's beak and smiled, feeling her nibble and nose at her knuckles. Harry nodded, *"Then it should be fine. Your magic is beginning to overflow because you've got a bit more than your body can handle, familiars tend to be the ones that absorb that little bit extra, they'll get improved physical health, extended life-spans, and increased intelligence in exchange. The little lady's getting a bit overburdened by the excessive magic, but Niflheim has a fairly high-powered curriculum so I highly doubt she'll have that problem for long. But just in case, let's keep an eye on things anyway?"* she suggested brightly as she went to her shelving unit and pulled down a large blue folder that she flipped through. *"Come back again next year during the holidays for a follow up, and we'll see how things are shaping up. If there's still an overburden then you may need a second familiar. It's not unusual,*

but it might also be a sign that you may need to see a healer yourself if that's the case, okay honey?"

Appointment booked, Hedwig was given the all clear to come with him to Niflheim and all of her paperwork was signed and stamped to prove it.

"Just in time," Ira declared as he let the door swing shut behind them, *"The ship is in three days. You have impeccable timing, little lady,"* he told the snowy, reaching over to stroke her head, ignorant to the flip of excitement that Harry's stomach gave at the news.

Three days he would be going to Niflheim Academy.

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Time passed almost too quickly for Harry.

It felt almost like between one breath and the next he had been a proud student of Hogwarts, now suddenly expelled, now living in a foreign country to attend a new school, and now... stood in the foyer of the Hostel, his trunk packed and sat beside him, surrounded by his year-mates, all of them bundled up tightly against the cold as they waited for their mentors to collect them. Today was the first day they would be travelling to Niflheim, they would arrive tomorrow evening in time for the Welcoming Feast.

Jesse was practically *vibrating* next to him, bundled up in a similarly cut forest green parka coat to Harry, Muffin Queen peering out of her carry case on top of his trunk looking decidedly unhappy with her strange captivity. Ingrid was next to him on his otherside, fussing with the decorative beading she had been sewing into her sleeves as a nervous gesture, tilting them this way and that to flash and catch the light, focusing all of her attention on that instead of the increasing tension of their yearmates. Behind them, Viivi was stood with Nikos, the two of them in comfortable silence as they observed their classmates.

"It isn't *technically* a two day trip," Jesse was babbling to Harry who was only half paying attention, "It's actually only a couple o' ours, but 'cause o'

the lightin' an' what not, we spend th'night on the ship 'fore settin' out in the morning by sled. We'll arrive about mid-afternoon," he babbled as he bounced from foot to foot. "Crikey, I wish they'd hurry it up. I'm sweatin' my ballsack off 'ere," he complained, pulling at the front of his parka and puffing for some air.

"Bear with it, Jesse. Our mentors will be here shortly," Viivi informed him slowly. The American's face spasmed a little when he glanced at her, as it had every time he looked in her direction because of her hat. Perched upon the vulture tengu's head was a knitted beanie hat. With knitted viking horns sticking out of the sides. She seemed to just be *waiting* for someone to comment, because when Harry said it was cool in the corridor before they got downstairs, she beamed at him, and said it was her favourite hat in all honesty, and she had a few.

"Right, right. I'm just nervous, I guess," he admitted.

"Everyone line up!" Mister Arif called from the front of the foyer, raising his hands above the crowding heads in order to be seen. *"First years to the right! Returners to the left! Scholars, if you could remain in the parlour at this time!"* he called as everyone hastily moved to obey.

Harry grabbed his trunk and Hedwig's empty cage and quickly hustled with his friends to the right-hand side of the foyer, realising with a start that, yes, there had been a lot more people in the hall than he had first realised as nine other people separated out of the group to stand opposite them. A small handful of humans, a few Lirren, one tengu boy, a pair of goblins that he *thought* were female, it was hard to tell with their winter gear on, and a four armed figure in violent shades of purple with horns and alarmingly cross-shaped pupils in blood red eyes.

"Alright, first years, your mentors will be arriving in just a few seconds. They will collect you and you will portkey one by one to the dock where they'll get your settled onboard. You'll be rooming with your mentor for the duration of your stay on the ship, if you've forgotten something here, then ask them to send a charter bird and we'll have it delivered to the school

before you get there. Returners will be portkeying after you have gotten yourselves into your assigned cabins, so please do not dawdle as the ship leaves at noon on the dot," the hostel manager explained to them all once they had separated to his liking. He beamed at them as the front door opened and a very pretty asian young lady in red winter clothing stepped in. Jesse stood up a little straighter beside him at the sight of her.

After her came several other people, Ira made his way over to Harry, Viivi was partnered with a stern faced dwarf wearing blue and white, Ingrid had a clever faced goblin in red and black, and Nikos was partnered with another Dryad, a young looking lady with pale green skin and hair that looked like it had *thorns* in it.

"*You okay?*" Ira asked quietly as Mister Arif began to hand out the portkeys, "*Excited?*"

"Very," Harry admitted with a grin.

"*Me too. I might have told all my friends about you, so they're all really eager to meet you. Just ignore anything stupid Orion says,*" he suggested with a roll of his eyes.

Harry peered up at him, "Are you two... fighting?" he asked warily.

The lirren sighed, "*A little bit, I suppose. He doesn't like the fact that I'm a mentor and spending so much of my time with someone else, and not him. He's got some... attachment issues. In that he's incredibly clingy,*" he explained with a fond grin before he collected their portkey from Mister Arif. "*Don't worry, Esme and I will keep him in line. And if not us, then Setsuna here will. She roomed with him when their mentors left the year before,*" he explained nodding to the asian woman in front of them with Jesse.

She glanced backwards and smiled kindly at him, before giving Ira a look of exasperation, "*You did tell Orion that your 'super cute and adorable' student was twelve, yes?*" she asked sarcastically.

Ira tilted his head at her for a moment, confused, before his eyes widened and he slapped a hand to his forehead.

"Fuck. No. I didn't. Suddenly it makes sense. Charter, I'm a moron," he complained, looking towards the ceiling.

"Well, you said it, not I," Setsuna told him archly before she grasped Jesse by the shoulder and the two of them vanished with a swirl of magic.

"What?" Harry asked, thoroughly bewildered.

Ira shook his head and gently grabbed his upperarm, a moment later the portkey activated and Harry felt his legs jar so hard he almost fell over if not for Ira's grip on him. *"I might have gushed about you to Orion a lot, and he's probably taken it the wrong way, and gotten jealous because I never told him you were twelve. Ugh,"* the lirren complained with a huff as he reached over to grab Harry's trunk.

The port was nothing special, separated from the commercial jetties, it was warded against observation or notice, the ferry itself was fairly large, with an observation deck, and a number of life-boats. The two made their way over and up onboard via the wooden gangplank – thankfully enclosed and with *railings*, and stepped onboard. Not too far ahead of them were Setsuna and Jesse, the former in tolerant silence while the latter babbled all about his Uncle Shane's barge up in Florida and how it had nothing on this particular build of ferry which was known to -

Harry didn't hear any more of his trivia as Setsuna guided him into their shared room and closed the door behind her.

The room next door was theirs, and it was fairly normal, nothing special in the slightest. A bunk-bed, a small porthole, and a pair of lockers that were big enough for their snow gear, and enough space under the bottom bunk for their trunks – which Ira immediately took advantage of to shove both his and Harry's away while the former Gryffindor stood on tiptoes to slide Hedwig's cage atop the lockers.

"Any preference for top or bottom?" he asked, and then hoisted himself onto the top when Harry shook his head, "I'll take top then, I prefer high places."

"Sure," Harry agreed, quickly stripping out of his snowgear before he overheated. The cabins themselves seemed to be warded against the bitter chill, and their porthole didn't look like the kind that could open.

Peering out, he could see more figures in brightly coloured snow gear appearing at opposite ends of the pier, all manner of different species from centaur to human to troll, tengu, and even that draconic people that he had yet to meet while staying in Amsterdam. Then he saw adults, scholars, appearing some of whom were dressed in finery, others in comfortable travelling clothes, some in sensible snow gear; either way, they were ushered up onto the ship by the familiar form of the Physical Defence Teacher, Mister Hyuga, who looked to be as lightly dressed as Ira. And just as unbothered.

The ship's horn sounded, and a bell kicked off somewhere.

Harry's stomach turned as he felt something shift beneath his feet, and the world outside his porthole move.

They were off.

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And at long last, here's a chapter! XDD;;;

this one just didn't want to work. I ended up having to delete it and begin again with a COMPLETELY different scene at least three times, and eventually just resorted to throwing scenes down in my notebook while at work to see which ones prompted continuing. This was our winner, and now we're on our way to the school.

13. Chapter 13

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

I do not own Harry Potter, Abhorsen, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, or Monster Hunter. I'm just playing with them.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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For all his skill on a broom, apparently ships were his kryptonite.

Barely half an hour into the trip, Harry was vomiting, *violently*, into the plastic vanity bin from the corner of their cabin. Ira had nudged him to sit on the floor with his back against the bed so he could bend over more easily to reach his impromptu vomit bucket, and was both holding his hair and rubbing his back, his nose clipped against the smell.

"I'm sorry kiddo, there's nothing I can do for motion sickness," the lirren lamented softly. Harry groaned, squeezing his eyes shut against the awful feeling in the pit of his stomach. He thought Ira was a healer, surely there was something he could do? *"Technically, there's nothing wrong with you,"* he continued, probably having felt something in his emotions, *"Your brain just thinks there is because what you're seeing doesn't match up to what your sense of balance is telling it, so it thinks you've been poisoned."*

Harry moaned inarticulately, pulling his head away from the vile smelling bin. He half-wanted to spoon his goddamn brain out with an icecream scoop right now, either his brain or his stomach. Which ever, he wasn't fussy right now. Ira flicked a scrap of paper covered in sigils into the bin, there was a flash of light and a puff of pale blue smoke a moment before the whole nasty mess inside vanished, and the lines on the paper turned red. He watched curiously, wanting to ask but too afraid to open his mouth, as the lirren picked the strip of paper back up and burned it. There went his syrup smothered chocolate chip pancakes. Traitors.

"Think you'll be okay on your own for a bit?" Ira asked softly, running his fingers lightly through Harry's hair, *"Setsuna might have some stomach soothing potions, and if not, I can raid the kitchen for ginger. It might help,"* he explained.

He nodded mutely, anything, *anything* to help would be appreciated. He couldn't believe it hadn't even been an hour since they left port and he was so bad, that they had another *day* of this, that they would have to sleep on the ship, was one that made his heart sink down to his feet. Ira got to his feet and leaned forward, he rubbed his cheek and jaw into the side of Harry's head, nuzzling him in a show of comfort before making his way out of the room.

Time passed as Harry huddled on his bunk, curled up in a ball with his eyes shut – it helped, a little, he found to keep them closed and to breathe as deep and steadily as he physically could. It might have been five minutes, it could have been twenty-five minutes, time was unimportant in the face of maintaining a grip on his stomach, someone knocked sharply on the door.

Ira would have knocked softly before letting himself in, knowing how badly Harry was feeling. He was considerate like that, always had been in the time that he had known him. Maybe this was Setsuna with that stomach soother?

Slowly, he uncurled and climbed out of the bed, flinching a little when the knock came again, a little harder with impatience this time. Pressing against the wall to steady himself, because honestly, he might not be able to feel the *ship* swaying beneath him, he was woosy enough without it that he wasn't confident in his balance right now. He opened the door, and looked up. And up.

The figure paused, hostile scowl melting into a frown of bewilderment as he looked down, and down again, and saw Harry. The stranger was tall, with four arms, vivid ruby red skin, long dark brown hair, three little black horns on his forehead, long pointed red ears adorned with golden hoops, clips, and ear-tip caps that a thin gold chain dangled from to the stud in his ear-lobe, and narrow golden eyes with red cross-shaped pupils. Every single one of his fingers, except for his index and middle-finger on his lower right arm ended in inch long black talons. He was dressed in Niflheim standard snowgear in shades of red, black, and gold.

He was almost exactly how the muggles depicted the Devil to look – just prettier.

Harry vomited on him.

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It was a bit of a blur from that moment on, mortified, he remembered apologising to the stranger profusely. It may have only been about a table-spoon's worth of bile and spit, hardly anything, but he'd still projectile vomited it over his leg. The stranger had merely waved it off, declaring that it was nothing that wouldn't wash out a moment before he was suddenly crowding Harry back into the cabin and closing the door behind him.

Harry had spluttered, reaching out to grab him, but wasn't quite fast enough as he dragged everything off the top-bunk onto the floor, closely followed by all of the bedding from the bottom bunk. Between one moment and the next, Harry found himself bundled up in a duvet, and sat in a strange kind of nest made of the stolen bedding on the floor – the stranger fussing over his temperature and tucking him in. It was surreal.

And then Ira got back.

The lirren paused from where he had poked his head into the room, and huffed a small smile, coming in properly once he saw the two of them. A box of overse medicine and a bottle of water in one hand, and a bag of crystallised ginger in the other. He wasted no time in crawling into the nest with them, offering Harry the pills and water, and rubbing his cheek against the stranger's face, tail flicking from side to side in lazy happiness. Was Red the mysterious Orion?

"*You didn't tell me he was so young,*" Red accused quietly, one of his hands coming up to wind around him, the other adjusting the bedding around them to make space for the third party.

Ira hummed, rubbing the underside of his jaw against Red's horns like a cat would a table edge, "*It didn't seem important,*" he admitted getting comfortable in the stranger's lap. "*He's powerful enough to attend, that's all that matters really.*"

Red grumbled, obviously not agreeing but unwilling to argue at that moment in time.

Ira made a strange huffing noise, not quite a laugh, not quite a sigh, "*Humans do things differently, Orion.*" Ah, he was. "*Harry is on his own. Same as I was.*" Same as him? Maybe. Harry didn't have younger siblings though. But that also indicated that Ira's parents were either dead, or he had been taken away from them by the Headmistress – he did say that he and his brothers had lived in the hostel the same as him when he first attended Niflheim.

Red, or rather, *Orion*, turned to stare at him with those strange cross-shaped pupils, his expression bordering on disbelieving. Harry grimaced as he sipped his water slowly, still tasting the bitter chalk of the pills he just took, "My parents died when I was a baby."

"*You are a baby*," the four armed teenager objected, and got nudged by his boyfriend.

Harry scowled at him, "I'm twelve, not ten, not a baby, and not a child," he grumped. Was he going to have to put up with that kind of commentary the *whole* time he attended this school? Would the Headmistress get upset if he started flicking stinging hexes at everyone who asked?

Orion's face spasmed even further and Ira patted him on the shoulder. He looked at his boyfriend, "*This is not acceptable*," the four armed youth stated flatly.

"Orion," Ira sighed as Harry bristled.

"*I'm moving in. Between the two of us we can put his weight back on track*," Red began to list, one hand scratching at his head while two more began to count off on his fingers, "*Can't do much about the stunted growth until his weight and nutrients normalise. We'll have to wait a few years before correcting his myopia*," he continued to list.

"*The glasses are cute though*," Ira pointed out lazily, offering Harry an apologetic smile even as he was ignored by his partner, the Gryffindor looking torn between confused and offended.

"*I'll contact my father, we'll need to inform him about this. Mother will likely want to meet him. Vega is going to have a field day, we haven't even Joined yet*," he continued dragging a clawed hand through his hair and tugging on a horn.

Ira laughed, "*Orion, we don't need to get your parents involved!*" he objected, "*He's not our child*."

Red frowned at him, "But he is *our responsibility*," he declared, holding a finger up directly in front of Ira's nose – forcing him to focus on said finger despite what he may have wanted. "You know what you are to me. Any responsibility of yours, is one of mine as well. He is not yet old enough to leave his mother's holding, therefore, we need to make a holding for him. It is only proper."

Ira pushed his finger down with a huff and a smile of fond exasperation, "He. Is. Human," the lirren reiterated. "He doesn't need a holding."

"That doesn't mean he shouldn't have one," Orion declared firmly. "Just because I do not need to eat ground mineral doesn't mean I shouldn't."

Ira groaned and dropped his head back onto his boyfriend's shoulder, "Do not start the salt argument again, please!"

Harry screwed the cap back on top of his bottle of water and rolled over, leaving the two to their quiet argument that somehow devolved into dietary habits and healthy salt-intake versus unhealthy salt-intake. As long as they stopped talking about him, it was fine. He was exhausted, and still felt rotten despite the pills Ira had gotten him, shaky and a little woosy. Hopefully a nap would set him to rights – it had rarely ever failed him before now.

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When Harry woke it was mostly dark, he could tell it was late, the sun had long since set, and the main-light in their cabin was turned off. Inhaling deeply, he reached for his glasses at the edge of the mattress just within reach and peered over his shoulder at the source of the pale blue-white light in the room.

Orion was still there, fast asleep, curled around Ira with two of his arms around the lirren's waist, and a wad of bedding under his head as he slept; using his stomach and hip as a backrest, Ira was still awake, sat with his legs drawn up and reading by the light of a charter-mark he had drawn onto

the wall above him. Harry identified it as a minor mark that just meant 'light-glow'.

Ira smiled when he looked up, "*How are you feeling?*" he asked, sliding a scrap of paper between the pages to mark his place before he closed his book.

He thought about it, "Better," he said. "Hungry. And my mouth tastes like the bottom of an owl cage."

Ira chuckled and reached behind him to pass over the now half-empty packet of crystallised ginger, "*That should fix things, at least until we're due to disembark. We'll eat before we get on the sleds. Think you can hold out that long?*" he asked kindly. Harry nodded. He was used to going hungry, and at least this time he wouldn't be alone in it like he used to be.

He slowly made his way through the ginger as Ira returned to his book, and Harry found his eyes sliding to Orion who was still sleeping soundly, and the gleaming black horns on his forehead.

"What is he?" he found himself asking quietly.

Ira glanced at him, and then down at his boyfriend, before putting his book down.

"Orion is a Sable, though you might be more familiar with the term Kali. They're older than lirren, with a much darker history. They were actually one of the peoples we were created to destroy." Harry looked up at him sharply in shock, Ira nodded, "Yeah. You can imagine his father's reaction when he found out about us. Orion was very nearly yanked out of Niflheim for it. His mother had to do a lot of fast talking and a lot of arrangements with me in order to keep things from getting out of hand. Sable are... well, for lack of a better term, half-demons. They're an ancient race, they predate humanity, much like lirren and several other peoples, no one is a hundred percent sure when they started popping up as it was during the Dark Era following the Sundering Cataclysm where wild magic was shattered and decided to do some extensive remodelling of the planet – by tearing open

chasms and throwing up volcanoes everywhere. The sheer amount of ash ended up settling on the highly magically charged atmosphere and blotted out the sun almost entirely. The Kali appeared during that time, and they were nothing like how they are now. They were monstrous back then, cruel, malicious. They took pleasure in the most depraved and evil acts, and that was how it was for many years. They were just as much slaves of their own nature as the lirren were upon our creation."

Harry shifted his weight to get comfortable, and listened eagerly as the snow leopard explained, seemingly lost in thought as his threaded one hand through Orion's hair, the other tracing the star patterns on the cover of his book.

"I think... in the end, it was humanity that taught both of our peoples how to overcome it. There's no proof of course. But the fact that despite millennia of war and stagnation, we started to develop at the same time as you means something. Yes, we may have done so faster, but humanity were the ones that showed us how to overcome our baser nature and instincts, I think. The Sable withdrew from the world for the most part, they hid their own continent Mu from prying eyes, and continued to develop themselves there, occasionally some would leave to learn and then return – hence you can find legends of multiple limbed men and women in places all over the world."

"The Goddess Kali? From Hinduism?" Harry suggested, straining his memory back to Junior School and the Thursday lessons in Religious Education. He always hated that class, but it was quiet and easy so he didn't mind it compared to others.

Ira shrugged a shoulder, "Sorry, Ignored mythology was never a topic of study for me."

"Religion," Harry corrected, wondering how someone could know next to nothing about such a massively practised religion around the world, he was fairly certain Pavarti and her sister Padma were Hindu, possibly Sikh as he didn't think he'd ever seen Pavarti cut her hair, or trim it, and the Sikh's

believed their bodies were gifts from their god, temples of worship in their image, and thus not to be altered in any way. No haircuts, piercings, tattoos, and the like.

The lirren wrinkled his nose, *"Alright, religion. Sorry. Unless it's medicine, I don't tend to pay much attention to Ignored culture. Mother –"* he cut himself off, ears laying flat as he took a deep breath, *"Mother was overly fond of Ignored pop-culture. To our detriment."*

"It's okay. I don't remember much, but the Goddess Kali was a four armed woman, I think she was blue? Or was that her husband?" he muttered, frowning, "But what little I remember of her story was that something happened that threw her into such a rage she became a demon, sowing destruction and death around her, wearing a belt of severed heads, wielding scimitars. Her husband, Shiva, lay beneath her to try and calm her anger, and when she realised she was trampling him, she immediately became sorry and stopped her rampage to tend to him."

Ira rubbed his ear thoughtfully, *"That does sound like a bloodrage. Sable are a bit prone to it if they're pushed over the edge. A little like the human Berserkers, but less physically damaging to them. Most Berserkers die of heart-failure before their thirties if I recall."* His ear flicked repeatedly as he thought it over, *"Either way, they've come a long way since those days."*

Harry nodded, not doubting it. He didn't think Headmistress Winters would have allowed someone who relished pain and destruction into the school, and to be honest, the worst thing he had seen out of Orion was how fussy he was. Everything had to be just so.

The lirren nudged him with a foot, *"Go back to sleep, kiddo. We've got a few more hours before we disembark, and then it'll be a long ride to school. And probably a cold one too."*

"Only if you go to sleep as well. You'll be the one driving me, right? No sleeping at the wheel," he warned with a grin as Ira snorted quietly and nodded, setting his book to one side.

"Very well. Sleep well, Harry."

"Night night, Ira."

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The port was tiny, little more than a stone pier that lead up to a fenced in area of reddish brown dirt and scrub surrounding a weathered wooden longhouse that was missing all of its walls. Filled with tables and benches, the only shelter the structure provided was a thick-thatched roof and several sturdy beams of wood that held it aloft. In the centre however was a huge firepit, and a large metal pan hanging from the ceiling beams above it that seemed to be filled with roasting meat and vegetables, filling the air with the scent of... Harry was fairly sure that was german sausage. Uncle Vernon loved going to the city centre every Christmas in order to get it, so Harry was quite familiar with the smell, even if he had never eaten it before.

As the students disembarked from the ship, they could see the scholars they had sailed with already ahead of them, some were helping the teachers and elves set up the food, others were hanging back talking amongst themselves, and a few were turning their noses up at everything around them. Serving platters and dishes were already set up on several of the tables, and Harry could see Yuri flipping sausages over in the huge pan while an unknown Niflheim elf worked some mushrooms and onions on the otherside, along with what he tentatively identified as cabbage.

A few of the older students sped up, calling boisterous greetings to the elves and staff members as they rushed down the pier to the long house.

A loud bark caught Harry's ears as Ira led him down, Orion behind them carrying all three of their trunks, one in each arm, proving himself incredibly strong. Craning his head, he could see a familiar snout craning over a fence not too far from the long house. Aragorn. It looked like he and his sled team, along with many other horse-sized huskies, were attempting to beg for tablescraps from the passing elves.

"It's a choose your own breakfast morning," Ira explained as they made their way down the path to join the thronging students as they swarmed towards the food. *"I know the trip was harsh on your stomach, but try to eat something. You'll feel better for having something solid in there, and our next meal won't be until eight o'clock tonight at the Welcome Dinner."*

Harry nodded, he didn't think there would be any worries about that right now. The travel sickness pills, ginger, and nap had done him a world of good for settling his stomach – he was absolutely *starving* right now. He would have eaten anything on that huge fry plate, even the cabbage, if it had been handed to him.

On top of the huge fry plate, there were platters featuring multiple foods, some more traditional breakfast stuffs, some rather *untraditional* stuffs – like cuts of raw meat, fish, rice, some kind of bun that smelt strongly of spices, and even things he wouldn't have considered an edible substance, like the fragrant wood-bark he saw on one serving platter that a centaur girl was contemplating. Ira got himself a bowl with a few chunks of raw red meat while Orion went primarily for the fruit and fish. Harry decided to play it safe and ignore the delicious smelling sausage for now, at least until he was sure his stomach had settled, and went for the pot of plain oat porridge. He added salt instead of the usual sugar, to make it Scottish style, and hope that it worked to settle his stomach. Wood swore by salted porridge for settling a bad stomach, said that too many sweet things could make it worse, but something plain to fill without irritating, and some extra salt to replace what was lost when vomiting would go a long way to making you feel better. Harry was willing to try it, he hated feeling sick.

As they ate, Harry got to meet a lot of new people.

"This must be Harry!" a girl exclaimed, suddenly appearing at Ira's shoulder, her golden eyes bright with interest as she stared at him, tawny red-brown and white wings twitching behind her as her ear-feathers flicked up and down excitedly. Harry stared at her from around a mouthful of breakfast in a little recognition. She had a pair of long chestnut coloured

braids that went well past her waist – it was the paperwing pilot that waggled her wings to him during his Open Day tour at Niflheim.

"Nice to see you too, Esme. Harry, this is Esme Springson, Captain of the school Flying Club. Es, this is Harry. No, he's not ten, he's twelve and rather tired of having people get it wrong," the snow leopard explained in a dry tone of voice, flashing his charge a wink when he caught the grin the boy threw his way.

The tengu girl stuck her hand out, *"Nice to finally have a name to the face! I knew you'd be cute, but by the Gale, you're adorable. You're going to have all four hands full when he gets older there, Rion,"* she teased playfully, with a grin as she looked to the Sable.

Ira groaned in horror as Orion straightened up, his strangely cross-shaped pupils somehow splitting into eight points, widening into a blood-red star in his golden irises, and then his eyes narrowed and they went back to normal. *"Low blow, bird-brain,"* he grit out as he slouched back down.

Esme chuckled as she shoved him to one side and sat down, *"Got you to do that freaky eye thing though. That's always worth a laugh."* She grinned at Harry from over the table, *"Ira hasn't shut up about you since Teacher Riveths assigned you, I feel like I know you already. If there's anything you need, don't be shy, you can come to me if you need to. Can't promise I'll be able to help, but I'll do my best!"* she declared with a proud slap of a closed fist on her chest, *"And if anyone gives you trouble, better to tell me than either of these two. Ira'll just tear them to pieces, and Orion'll ruin their families. Me? I'm the nice one."*

Ira nearly choked on his meat, *"You flew Lingshen to the sea and dropped him in it the last time you two argued!"*

She flipped a dismissive hand, *"He was fine. It was barely half an hour's swim back to school."*

Seeing the look of alarm on Harry's face, Orion leaned in close, *"Lingshen is a selkie. He was completely fine, just irritated he was late for Enchanting*

class," he explained in an undertone, "Esme is actually the most moderate of us when she's angry. Her pranks might seem a little extreme at first glance, but no one is ever hurt, or overly humiliated."

Harry nodded slowly, "What did he do that upset her so much?" he asked quietly.

Orion's expression darkened, *"The worst thing. He went with another woman while declaring himself to Esme."*

It took him a second to translate that. Lingshen cheated on Esme when they were together.

"However, she is incredibly fierce when protecting others. If Ira or I are unavailable, go to her," Orion told him firmly as a few other people passed them by, calling greetings to the trio and receiving nods or waves.

"So!" Esme exclaimed, butting back into the conversation, grinning at Harry, *"Ira tells me you're interested in the Flying Club."*

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And chapter finished. Less like pulling teeth, but I definitely began to run out of steam. OTL

14. Chapter 14

NIFLHEIM ACADEMY

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Summary: "The Ministry must be seen to do something", and with that, Harry Potter's wand is snapped. Expelled in his second year, he is invited to a new school famous for being the home of one of the Eight Great Repositories of Knowledge. But with Voldemort alive and the Chamber of Secrets still open, he will need every resource his new school possesses to stay alive in the coming years.

Warnings: Slash, fem-slash, het, character death, Canon-mangling, torture, politics, a BUTTLOAD of Original Characters, Original magic, **minor crossovers with: Abhorsen trilogy, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar the Last Airbender, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, and Monster Hunter.**

I do not own Harry Potter, Abhorsen, Mahou Sensei Negima, Avatar, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Shadow Hearts, or Monster Hunter. I'm just playing with them.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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Multiple people came over during breakfast to talk to both Ira and Orion, and meet Harry for the first time. They all seemed to be shocked over his age though, which was incredibly aggravating for the former Gryffindor as he was forced to repeat, again and again, *he wasn't bloody ten.*

"Sorry, Harry," Ira said, rubbing at his ears, "I didn't realise they'd go completely stupid over it."

Orion snorted dismissively, folding his lower arms and reaching for his drink, "Only you would think the youngest ever Niflheim student was nothing to be wound up over," he pointed out dismissively, flashing his boyfriend a fond, but exasperated smirk, "If it isn't to do with healing or exorcism, you don't tend to notice much about it."

Ira scowled at him, "I notice!" he snapped defensively, and then slapped away his boyfriend's hand when the sable reached out to ruffle his hair with a mocking coo of 'of course you do, sweetheart'.

Esme had been ignoring them as she scribbled rapidly in a notebook, only to suddenly shove aside Harry's empty bowl of porridge and slide the book over, "There. This is the Flying Club, everything we do, and the flying things we have. We've got almost all of them, some are easier than others, some are barred to club members unless they're also part of other clubs – like our little planes here for instance, unless you're part of the Technomancy club, you're not getting in one. The Charter Skins and Paperwings are also barred to anyone not in the Charter Magic classes, but that's simply because you can't even operate them without knowledge of charter magic. Well," she paused then and flapped a hand, "You could use straight up wind manipulation to fly a paperwing, but you can do that with a kite, so what's the point? It also takes constant concentration for something that large, so I wouldn't let you anyway unless you were a final year student."

Flying Club members were responsible for patrolling the glacier around the school, looking for unusual activity, lost students, lost scholars, icebergs, wild-life, etc. They also ferried students to and from various islands like the Muspelheim student market that took place on a small, semi-inhospitable spit of land ten miles away from the school and other islands where students went to perform their more destructive magics and experiments where they couldn't upset the school if need be.

"It's a huge responsibility," the hawk tengu declared proudly, buffing her nails on her handsome white-fur trimmed walnut brown coloured parka.

"But we're up to the challenge. Are you?" she asked severely, slamming her fist down on the table and staring him dead in the eye.

Harry blinked, leaning back in his seat, "Uh. Sure?" he blurted.

Flying Club. Couldn't be any harder than... than what? Going through the trap-door? Detentions in the Forbidden Forest?

He shrugged, "Can't be worse than a Troll." He paused and then leaned forward, "Can it?" Because... he *barely* made it out of that encounter. It was sheer dumb-luck, as Professor McGonagall said, that kept him alive in that scuffle.

Esme's eyes narrowed, *"You're, what? A second year? What are you doing going anywhere near Trolls?"* she demanded shrewdly.

Harry quickly stuffed his mouth with a breadroll and answered her, his words completely unintelligible through the food, as he wanted. She glared at him, lips pursing in a manner strangely reminiscent of Professor McGonagall, but sat back and wriggled a little – her feathers fluffing up briefly on her wings, and her head, only to settle down again.

"Fine. Don't tell me then. I suppose I can't expect you to spill your life's story to a complete stranger." She reached for her drink primly, taking a slow sip as Harry relaxed a little and swallowed his food, she eyed him, *"We'll test your flight capabilities tomorrow, I think. Students get three days after arrival to attend introductory classes, collect books, settle in properly, and familiarise themselves with the school. I'll show you the flight-deck after breakfast, if that's alright with you, Ira?"* she asked, peering at the leopard who was carefully cleaning his hands with a wetwipe.

He hummed, *"As long as it isn't before eight-am, I don't mind."*

Orion leaned over, *"Esme gets up at five every morning for Flying Club. She handles the first patrol of the morning, so she's always up and entirely too enthusiastic by the time Ira drags himself out of bed,"* he explained in an undertone, making Harry nod slowly as he eyed the differences between

the two. He supposed it made a kind of sense, Esme was a bird, and Ira was a cat (in its most boiled down and probably racist basics), she would probably be quite alright with waking up at first light, while Ira seemed to like his sleep – and lots of it.

A loud whistle tore the air, saving him from having to think of a response, and drawing the eyes of all the students and scholars to the fire-pit where Yuri was stood grinning roguishly at them, waiting for the last pockets of chatter to die down.

"Everyone eaten?" he called, receiving the familiar school-drone of yes's from the assembled students. "Awesome! Right, it's almost rime to push off, so everyone go empty your bladders, get yourselves kitted up and ready to make a move! You've got half an hour to get yourselves a sled and then we're off!" he shouted over the sudden clamour of movement as the older students got to their feet.

"*Leave your bowl, Harry,*" Ira told him as he downed the last of his drink, "*The elves will handle it for us this one time,*" he explained over the din of activity as they abandoned the long house for the tiny cluster of outhouses on the otherside of the pier.

"*I'll catch up,*" Esme said, spreading her hawk-wings, "*The line for the ladies is always huge, gotta get in there quick!*" she took off, flying over the heads of the milling students as the three boys got into their own line for the boys.

"What's that line?" Harry asked pointing to a smaller one for a third set of toilets.

Ira hummed, but it was Orion who answered, "*Not everyone is male or female. Those are for them.*"

Harry frowned up at him, that... didn't make sense, "*Not male or female? But – I don't understand.*"

Orion shrugged a shoulder, "You're human. Biologically speaking for humans, you either have the genitals of one sex, or you have the other. Sometimes people are born with both. But even in humans, someone will be born with a mind that belongs to one sex but have the genitals of the other. Sometimes there are people who do not mentally identify as male or female, and some who feel as though they are in the middle. There is one person here who changes from day to day depending on how they feel. For those of us who are not human, there are other physical differences on top of that."

He then looked down at Harry with a smirk, "For instance. I have a father, and two mothers, though one would perhaps not be thought of as female by human definitions."

Harry's head was spinning, and he was slightly afraid to ask for fear of coming across rude. He knew how Uncle Vernon would have spoken regarding this (oddly, it was one of the few issues he and Aunt Petunia argued on, Uncle Vernon did not like gay people, Aunt Petunia had gay friends and would argue to the back-teeth in support of them, Uncle Vernon learned to keep his mouth shut), and he was scared that he might sound like him when speaking.

Ira caught his shoulders, "You can ask, Harry," he said kindly, "We know you don't mean it maliciously, you just don't understand and you want to."

He swallowed, "What do you mean by... 'human definitions'?" he asked warily.

Orion smirked, "Sable families are in units of three. One male, the blood-father, to inseminate; one female, the blood mother, to lay eggs; and one carrier, the water-mother, to develop and birth the children."

"Rion, are you giving a fucking sex lecture on the first day?" one of the boys in the line demanded from behind them in tones of horror and hilarity.

Orion shrugged, "I suppose I am. Now shush," he commanded dismissively as the stranger peered around him to see Harry, the dragon-like features of an older student taking him by surprise as much as Harry's obvious youth

was to him. "*Blood-mothers essentially have genitalia similar to that of males because they implant eggs within the water-mother. Hence, the Blood-Women of my people would use those facilities, instead of the traditionally female ones simply for comfort, to avoid questions, or to prevent those unfamiliar with Sable physiology from getting the wrong idea and reacting poorly.*"

The boy behind them scoffed, "*What? No consideration for the guys at all?*" he demanded sarcastically with a shake of his head before he leaned past to see Harry and jerked a thumb at Orion whose mildly amused smirk dropped, "*What he isn't saying is that male Sable have two fuckin' dicks. One of which is twice the size of the other. Talk about emasculating.*"

Orion grabbed his head and shoved him face first into the snow without another word, his eyes narrowing irritably as Ira chuckled and Harry blushed darkly. Two?

The former Gryffindor nodded awkwardly as Ira moved into one of the stalls ahead of them, still laughing, "I see. Sorry if I asked anything rude," Harry muttered, avoiding eye-contact.

"*If you do not ask, it is likely no one will think to explain. Your turn,*" Orion pointed out, nodding to an empty stall.

Relieved to escape the discomfiting conversation about body parts in public (it was one thing to sit there while Seamus talked about boobs and penis, that was in the dormitories, in *private*), he sorted himself out and did his business before leaving and rejoining Ira stood to one side waiting for them.

It barely took ten minutes to get themselves sorted totally, and that included getting out their heavier duty snow-gear than just the parkas they had been wearing beforehand, and collecting their trunks from the pier. Ira had told him to wear his thermals before they left the ship, so he wasn't trying to change in the middle of a frozen field like the bison lirren, Magnus, in his year. He had come off the ship wearing his snow-shoes, so for Harry it meant swapping his glasses for his goggles, getting his facemask out and pulling on two sets of gloves, one of which was mittens. Ira pulled on a set

of gloves, facemask, and goggles, but didn't do much more than pull his hood-up and tie the draw strings in place. Orion beside them looked like a strange Inuit-Arabian ninja in his entirely black snow-gear, his head wrapped in a black scarf that also covered his mouth and with his hood pulled up over it, belted shut over his waist, and both Harry's and his own trunk set over his shoulders (and nothing Harry said about being perfectly capable of pulling it himself would get the sable to return it either – Ira just laughed at him as he carried his own trunk just ahead of them).

Excitement tingled across his skin as he followed after the two older students, double checking his glasses were safely zipped up in a pocket, his goggles were strapped on securely, and his parka was done up properly. Behind the long-house, the fenced in paddock had about thirty sleds in total, twenty to twenty-five of them were taken by pairs of students, and the remaining ones were piled high with trunks all strapped into place. Each sled had a team of three horse-sized huskies harnessed to pull it, he could see Aragorn at the head of one sled, sadly already occupied, but by a miserable looking dumpling he managed to identify as Jesse wrapped in entirely too many blankets and somehow still cold. Around them students were mounting up onto magically inclined reindeer and horses, a young tengu boy was perched on the back of a large bipedal velociraptor like creature that was blue and had yellow eyes and a dark blue almost black horn crest on its head, a small group of girls were harnessing a trio of weird rabbit-koala-bear type animals with smooth almost penguin like bellies. Another girl was putting together a muggle-style wind surfer, and a dwarven boy was fiddling with a muggle snowmobile covered in runes, not charter marks, actual runes. The centaur students were helping one another into insulated socks to protect their legs, and a few of them were even wearing *saddles*? Apparently they didn't mind helping take their friends to school? Given how Firendz had been told off by his herd-members for carrying Harry on his back to save his life... it was kind of surreal to see young centaur willingly allowing anyone to ride them, let alone wearing a saddle.

"Centaur are proud, but when they make the offer themselves, it would be rude to refuse more than twice," Ira explained in an undertone when he

caught sight of where Harry's eyes were lingering.

"Twice?" he asked quietly.

"Three is a powerful number. Some centaurs believe that to reject an offer three times is to reject the one offering. It is considered good manners to reject something twice, and then accept. The dark one over there? He offered to let his girlfriend ride with him because he wanted to have her company for a while longer before they got to school. She rejected the offer once, saying that she didn't want him to believe she thought him lesser than her, he assured her he knew she loved him and viewed him as equal, and offered again, she refused, saying it was a long journey and she was concerned about his health, he promised that he was strong enough to manage and that he wanted her company, and offered again. She said yes, but if she hadn't, he would have viewed it as her rejecting his company and thus he, himself. They would have broken up," the lirren explained as they came to an unoccupied sled harnessed to a slender white husky and her two identical chocolate and cream coloured brothers.

"I – his girlfriend is human?" Harry asked, glancing over again to see a rather pretty older girl in leathers and furs now perched comfortably in the saddle, her arms wrapped around the centaur's waist as she rested her chin on his shoulder and grinned at his friends.

Ira chuckled, "*Interspecies relationships aren't unusual at Niflheim,*" he said pointedly as Orion suddenly swept a blanket over Harry's shoulders and practically tucked him into it.

The twelve year old spluttered and tried to wriggle free, but with a muttered spell found himself physically sealed into the fur. He scowled at Orion who grinned completely unrepentant, "*You're so tiny, it wouldn't do to freeze to death before you got to school,*" he said making Harry splutter in offence. He was just *young!* He wasn't short, he wasn't *ten*, he was just *young!* If they kept up with that kind of commentary he may just develop a height complex and it would be all their faults, the bastards.

He ignored the sable as best he could, "I mean, the centaur back home *hate* humans. It's just... Firendz got told off for saving my life last year, it's a bit of a shock to find out that one has a human *girlfriend*," he explained as Ira batted his partner away and shoved him towards one of the reindeer.

"Orion, you can fuss later! We've got ten minutes before we go, get saddled up!" the lirren scolded before ignoring him and turning to Harry, *"Sit here, Harry. And is it so surprising that human-centaur relations are different in other places of the world?"* he asked curiously.

"I – " Harry paused, "haven't thought about it, to be honest."

Ira chuckled as he got Harry settled into the kind of boat-like sitting space in front of the handles before he hoisted their trunks into place and began to strap them down. *"It's the same everywhere in the world. Relationships between people and species will be different from one country to the next, hell, one city to the next. But as long as everyone is happy, healthy, and willing, then who am I to say what should and shouldn't happen between them? Many people would say that Orion and I can't be together because of the bad history and blood between our peoples, thankfully his Water-mother did not feel the same way and fought tooth and nail to support us. Just remember that what you believe is not what other people believe, and as long as no one is hurting anyone, then it's none of your business."*

As much as he hated the idea of comparing them, Ira sounded a lot like Aunt Petunia when he said that. It was the same thing she said to Uncle Vernon when he complained about gay people 'what other people do in their bedrooms has nothing to do with us as long as everyone is a consenting adult, it's none of our business'.

Esme appeared then, perched on top of a huge muscular horse, *"You ready, Harry?"* she asked brightly as Ira fussed over him again before getting onto the sled behind him.

"Yes."

She grinned and then pointed to the front of the group, "*Get a good seat then, Teacher Yuri shows off his harmonixing first thing in the year. Not many get to see a Greater Earth Spirit in action, we're just lucky like that,*" she told him with a grin before spurring her horse forward.

"Harmonixing?" Harry asked, craning his head as with a flick of the reigns Ira encouraged the dogs to move forward to where the others were waiting.

Ira nodded, "*A blood-line magical skill that originated in Japan. I believe Teacher Yuri is the last natural born Harmonixer in the world. It's a skill that necessitates the destruction of demons, and then allows the victor to consume and then dominate their souls. Once conquered, the harmonixer can then transform into said demon, controlling its power, and abilities.*" He leaned down close to Harry's ear, "*Rumour has it, Teacher Yuri once ate the soul of a god in his youth, hence his immortality now.*"

The god monster that set Shanghai on fire, the one that Yuri sealed away that cost him his sanity until his wife could save him. Harry swallowed, huddling down in his blankets as Ira jerked and stared at him in surprise.

"*You know something,*" he whispered.

Harry shrugged awkwardly, "I don't know if I can tell you. It might be private," he muttered, and then felt Ira's hand drop on his head.

"*Don't worry about it then. Just get yourself comfortable, it's a long ride to the school.*"

A whistle pierced the air and suddenly the activity around them exploded three-fold, all the students now rushing around as if their heads were cut off, the five minute warning whistle Ira told him as they watched upper years mount up, snap their face-masks up and get their goggles into place. The centaur with his girlfriend took position behind one of the sleds so they could cut through the thick snow-drifts for him, Orion and Esme appeared on either side of them with Jesse and his mentor, Setsuna, behind them. Jesse wiggled his head in greeting from his blanket dumpling, and Harry

couldn't help but laugh at him – and at the sight of Muffin peering out from his hood.

There was a bright flash of light at the front of the group, and by the time Harry looked back, he could only stare at the huge eight-foot humanoid white wolf in front of them. It... was *built* similarly to a werewolf, or so the pictures in his Defence texts suggested, but thicker, more powerfully muscled, and framed in tufts of white fur.

The wolf turned his snout to the sky and howled a long thin, attention grabbing note.

Glowing amber-red eyes looked over them all once silence fell before dropping to fall fours and loping out into the snows.

"*Ya!*" one of the upper-year girls commanded, spurring her reindeer on after him, and starting the mass exodus of students through the snows.

It was exciting – for all of twenty minutes.

But it was still pleasant even as the tedium of travel set in once again.

Unlike the Hogwarts Express, there was something much more organic about the sled-travel as students rode up along side each other to talk or chat, warnings were passed up and down the line of hazards up ahead, and Harry got to see students using their magic freely as they all moved. Up ahead, a student was using broad sweeping gestures to push huge snow-drifts out of the way of the group and giving the centaurs better footing as they ran, another was occasionally flipping fallen tree-branches or clumps of ice out of their path.

Someone started singing somewhen into the journey, and soon the whole lot of them were joining in, pirate shanties could be heard at one point, and Harry laughed when he heard Jesse start another Queen sing-along (that quickly got the *entire* group of students singing along, and Yuri howling up ahead, all in concert with each other). One of the girls on the weird koala-rabbit skidded up to them, her mount sprawled out on its belly, propelling

them forward using its stomach like a penguin would, while the others had doubled up on their Koalas because they were certainly big enough, she had turned hers into a kind of mobile cafe and was moving up and down the line offering hot drinks and snacks. It was so surreal for Harry he found himself refusing out of reflex even as Ira collected a cup of apple tea.

Thankfully she came back a few hours later just as his stomach started grumbling about the lack of lunch, and he thankfully accepted some apple tea of his own, and a few biscuits. The tea was incredibly sweet, almost *too* sweet, and the girl cheerfully said it was a family recipe.

He eventually tasted the sea, and felt his chest thud *hard*.

They were almost there.

"Harry, we're going to overtake the others quickly, hold on tight!" Ira called to him, giving him a moment to tuck his empty cup away and get a hold of the sled before he spurred the three dogs ahead into action. The white female dropped her head and launched herself forward, her steps changing pace as she charged on ahead, picking up the pace and taking them out of their comfortable path behind the others to one side where the snows were less packed down and rougher.

Cold lashed at him as they moved out of some kind of barrier, and Harry huddled down in his blankets in surprise, he hadn't realised the other students were doing something to prevent the worst of the wind from stealing the warmth out of their bones. He watched as they passed the line of teenagers, spotting Ingrid and Viivi as he passed, saw Magnus now properly kitted out and bundled up in front of a girl dressed as lightly as Ira, with huge white and black speckled wings tucked up behind her – a snowy owl tengu. That must be his mentor. Then he realised a few other students were moving ahead of the pack with them.

"What's going on?!" he shouted over the wind.

"We're approaching the sea! The Water Elemental students need to get ahead so we can raise the bridge!" he shouted back as they went over a

bumpy patch and Harry felt his butt leave his seat with an unpleasant jolt.

Then he saw it, just like last time, perched atop the glacier with all its windows ablaze with light. Niflheim.

And then all the students around him threw their arms up into the air, including Ira, their eyes slit with concentration as they worked their magic – something heavy filling the air.

It wasn't the ice-flowers that Laerer Riveths raised, no, this was choppier, less pretty, and significantly less attractive as it formed like ice-crystals, spikes and shards lancing out of the ocean, cracking and shrieking with effort as they swelled and puffed out in the water until a flat bridge formed. Wide enough for all of them as the waves came together and the students continued to run, their arms windmilling purposefully through the air as they continued to build the bridge they all crossed.

Harry shifted in his seat to see behind him as Yuri skidded to a stop and watched them all as they crossed the water, making sure everyone made it before chasing after them himself, the ice shattering and falling into the ocean in his wake, either because of his own power, or because the older students willed it, Harry couldn't tell as he jerked in his seat, the dogs taking them up the steep-incline towards the school.

Ira panted, grabbing tightly onto the sled, *"First time doing that, no one ever tells you how tiring it is, damn,"* he gasped.

"You alright? You're not going to fall off, are you?" Harry asked in concern, twisting and grabbing at his arms fearfully.

Ira gave him a fanged grin, *"Sticking charms on my feet, I'm fine."* He paused then, looking past him before grinning, *"Eyes forward, snowflake, we're almost home."*

Harry twisted back into his seat excitedly as he saw the open gates looming up ahead, the warm glow of the towers and the blue arching roof.

The Headmistress was waiting for them on the steps as they pulled into the courtyard.

Yuri raced past them all, and jumped up the stairs, transforming mid-air and landing a step away from his wife whom he swept up into his arms without pause, spinning her around like a newly-wed couple. No one paid them much attention as the courtyard rapidly became a scene of organised chaos with students dismounting, getting off the sleds, and stretching their limbs out.

Harry stared up at Headmistress Winters as she smiled at her colleagues, and then looked out over all her students, visibly counting them all. When she came to him, she didn't even pause, counted, and then moved on. As if he was the same as any other student.

Ira caught his shoulder, jarring him out of his staring, "*C'mon, let's get our stuff to our room and warm up. There's two hours until the feast so let's get your room to your liking, yeah?*" he suggested with a grin.

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And they're FINALLY there!

If anyone is interested in the story of Alice and Yuri, I'm doing a Silent Let's Play of Shadow Hearts on my facebook. Feel free to give it a watch if you're interested, or, alternatively, read the wikia. XDD